



Tradition, Modernity, and Marginal Voices: A Comparative Study of Social Vision in Ruskin Bond and Vijaydan Detha

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ABSTRACT: There is indication of the social ideas which occur in the words of Ruskin Bond and Vijaydan Detha who appear to be exceptionally sound writers with completely different backgrounds into this paper. Bond in his work delicately creates links between nature and people beautifully while Detha's tilt towards resistance and questions the traditions and resonates with folk culture of Rajasthan in India. In this paper it is shown how both the writers deal with the conflicts that exist between modern life and our traditional culture, which is done through deep analysis of their works and understanding the themes covered in them. Bond's stories undoubtedly bring back our faith in kindness and simple human goodness which is missing in today's world and they kind of stand clear against all the noise of modern life and the damage people keep doing to nature while Detha, on the other hand takes old village tales and somehow turns them into weapons depicting truth showing what's unfair and dreaming of a better and more awakened world. And when you read them together you can feel how Indian writing holds so many different voices and yet beats with the same heart of empathy and moral warmth. In a way, both writers remind us that deep cultural roots and forward looking imagination don't have to clash, they can actually grow side by side keeping both tradition and progress alive.

Keywords: Ruskin Bond, Vijaydan Detha, tradition, modernity, marginal voices, folklore, subaltern, Himalayan writing, Rajasthani oral tradition, social realism

1. Introduction

Indian literature with its mix of countless cultures and the languages has always tried to find a middle path between the old and the new and it seems kind of a long running tug of war where it's understood how to hold on to traditions and still give space to voices that were once ignored or silenced. In this wide space, Ruskin Bond and Vijaydan Detha appear like two ends of a rainbow, different in perspectives yet connected somewhere deep. As Meena G. Khorana (2003, p. xii) writes, "Bond's strong evocation of the Himalayan setting also recalled happy memories of studying at a British public school in Shimla, Auckland House, the sister school of Bishop Cotton, where Bond had studied, and of summer vacations at my grandparents' homes in Shimla and Kashmir. This ability to project a vision of India that the reader can identify with is one of the most endearing characteristics of Bond's work." Bond who's an Anglo-Indian and the one who mostly writes in English, draws quiet power from the misty hills of Uttarakhand where his world moves slowly almost like the rhythm of nature itself while Detha on the other hand, comes from the dry deserts of Rajasthan, and he keeps the pulse of his people alive by retelling old folk tales and oral legends passed down over time (Ramanujan, 1991). India today in a way feels torn between globalization, environmental decline, and the constant tug of identity issues while still carrying the weight of its old social layers (Appadurai, 2008). It explores how they speak for the marginalized, rework what they've inherited and offer a gentler

vision of how life could be. Within India's postcolonial world of writing, Bond and Detha show that even deeply local voices can talk in their own way to the global present (Chakrabarty, 2001).

2. Literature review

2.1 Ruskin Bond: The Poet of Mountains and Innocence

Ruskin Bond, born in 1934 in Kasauli to a British father and an Anglo-Indian mother, occupies a unique cultural position in Indian literature. Agrawal (2020, p. 17) asserts, "Bond is Indian by heart, so his literature has an Indian appeal." His hybrid lineage positions him at the intersection of self and other, tradition and modernity. This liminal identity informs his writing, allowing him to depict Indian life with intimate familiarity while simultaneously observing it with a quiet, reflective detachment. Bond's sense of belonging is shaped not by colonial privilege but by personal attachment to the Indian landscape and its ordinary people, enabling him to articulate marginalized experiences within a seemingly simple narrative frame.

Ruskin Bond's literary world is shaped by the Himalayan foothills including Mussoorie, Dehradun, and Garhwal villages, colonial and post-colonial memory, nature-centered life and environmental simplicity, and emphasis on childhood, solitude, friendship, and ordinary people. His narratives reflect an ecological consciousness that resonates with contemporary ecocritical theories that emphasize the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds. Bond writes against the growing alienation of contemporary life. His fiction presents hill communities threatened by modernization unplanned resorts, commercialism, and ecological degradation (R. Jain, 2016).

Rather than dramatic political revolt, Bond celebrates quiet resistance through kindness and moral integrity, inter-community harmony, protection of nature, and respect for ordinary people and forgotten lives. His work demonstrates "environmentalism of the poor," where ecological preservation is intimately linked with cultural survival. Meena G. Khorana (2003, p. 150) writes, "He writes for a special type of 'gentle reader' who is interested in the beauty of nature and the dignity in the lives of ordinary people rather than in stormy events. While he does not write provocative social protest stories, his stories deal with social issues such as preservation of the Himalayan environment, rights of animals, respect for humanity, and a sense of justice and fair play." Bond's work is often read as nostalgic, yet it subtly critiques development-driven violence and loss of cultural rootedness. His narrative style embodies the "structure of feeling" of rural communities facing transformation. As Agrawal (2020, p. 17) writes, "Bond presents an honest picture of the contemporary Indian scene. In fact no Anglo-Indian writer can be so bold and forthright in his criticism of Indian ways of life as he is." The simplicity of his prose masks a sophisticated understanding of social dynamics and power relations in hill society (Agrawal, 2020).

2.2 Vijaydan Detha: Folklore as Social Revolution

Vijaydan Detha, often called "Shakespeare of Rajasthan", dedicated his life to preserving and transforming the folk tales of western India. As Vanita (2000, p. 319) writes, "Vijay Dan Detha is one of India's leading short story writers and among the most eminent writing in Rajasthani today." His major contributions include collection and retelling of thousands of Rajasthani oral tales, co-founding Rupayan Sansthan, a folk-research institute, raising voices of women, Dalits, and marginalized rural communities, and using folklore to question patriarchy, caste dominance, and feudalism. Detha's stories, such as "Dhuan", "Duvidha", "A Day in the Life of Kanchan", and "The Royal Hunt", dismantle oppressive traditions through sharp satire and magical narrative elements. His characters challenge gender norms, feudal oppression, social hierarchies, religious orthodoxy, and exploitative power systems. As Francesca Orsini (2002, p. 41) notes, "it was only through literature that the critique of untouchability could carry a more general argument about justice and individual rights in the Hindi sphere." Detha's literary practice aligns with organic intellectualism drawing from and speaking to subaltern communities. Detha's folk universe is thus not a celebration of

tradition alone, it is a radical reimagining of tradition where freedom, equality, and creativity rule (Naithani, 2006). His work represents the “political domain” of indigenous resistance, where traditional forms become vehicles for contemporary critique. The oral tradition that Detha draws upon functions as “primary orality,” maintaining living connections to communal memory and collective wisdom.

3. Tradition and modernity in their narratives

3.1 Bond: Tradition as Emotional Ethics and Ecological Wisdom

The human values, their wisdom, and a beautiful way of living is what Ruskin Bond idolises traditions to rather than orthodox rituals in it and for him tradition simply means piece coexistence and values that often are neglected in modernity (Chacko, C.J. & Sudhir, 2019). In the Ruskin Bond’s world the modern age is kind of inviting the negatives like the greediness, environmental loss and others like negligence. Bond’s people like Rusty, Binya from *The Blue Umbrella* and Prem in *A Flight of Pigeons* somehow hold on to honesty and heart even when the world around them gets controlled by material desires along with this Bond doesn’t really throw modernity away rather he just dreams of a softer and a more humane version of it where one that still remembers the hills, values of kindness and doesn’t run completely blind for success. As Mieke Bal (1997, p. 15) explains, “duration refers to the relation between the time events take in the story and the time their representation takes in the text,” and Bond’s writing? It moves at a quiet pace which is standing calm against the rush that defines modern life. In a way this calm feels a lot like Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* where we saw true progress means growing morally and spiritually and not just building machines and related stuffs. And through his simple almost meditative stories he gently teaches us to care again and to find compassion, balance and that rare peace that comes from living simply and honestly.

3.2 Detha: Tradition as Site of Contestation and Liberation

Vijaydan Detha though do not treat tradition like some old blanket but it is more like a restless field where ideas keep pushing over into each other but for him tradition isn’t fixed but kind of alive with full of contradictions and a mix of shadow and light. As Zipes (p. 2) states, “Both the oral and the literary traditions continue to exist side by side today, interact, and influence one another, but there is a difference in the roles they now play compared to their function in the past.” He openly admits that these customs carry deep traces of patriarchy and caste hierarchies and yet he somehow finds within that very soil the small sparks of defiance. Detha’s sense of modernity doesn’t chase Western ideals rather it quietly grows out of the moral core of folk wisdom and the kind that is been whispered in for generations. In *Duvidha* when a ghost marries a living woman it’s not just a strange tale but rather it becomes this eerie tug between duty and desire and between what society demands and what the heart wants and in a similar situation in his *A Girl Like Me* the old borders of gender slowly melt away as the heroine pushes back against the walls built around her. Detha’s storytelling style blends a pinch of magic, the rhythm of oral lore, sly humor and a playful mischief which always keeps on questioning who gets to rule and why. As Casanova (2004, p. 226) notes, “the transposition of oral practices to written form amounts to an attempt to create literature and thus convert folk tradition into literary wealth,” and his idea of tradition isn’t calm but it is an alive thought which by turning folklore itself into quiet resistance, he hands a voice to those who never had one a voice that sounds ancient but hums with the rebellion. And that subtle energy, somehow reminds all of us of (Richard White’s, 2017) idea that storytelling can hold both wisdom and criticism all at once. So in Detha’s world folk tales don’t just save the past rather they become a soft but steady call for moral and social awakening wrapped gently in the warmth of words we’ve always known.

4. Representation of marginal voices

4.1 Bond's Marginal Figures

Ruskin Bond mostly writes about the people who somehow live on the edge of things, the lonely orphans, the old who are forgotten, the hill folks, the small traders, even animals and trees that no one really notices at all yet he is the one who does and he writes them with such quiet care that they start feeling alive again. Agrawal (2020, p. 18) states, "Bond lyrically recreates in English language the Indian ethos and the variegated phenomena of his surrounding especially the hills and the people." His critics argue that Bond will never really hamper the social structures according to him his resistance grows from kindness rather than revolt and maybe that is true as his power doesn't come from mere words but from empathy.

Bond's sense of exclusion works through the feeling with that gentle ethical approach that makes you pause because of its softer approach instead of protest and along with this his Anglo-Indian roots also give him what many call a "border consciousness" which is a kind of belonging to many worlds at once. The children he writes about as (Schulz 1965) once said of Romantic literature are those tiny beings full of instinctive wisdom which still untouched by the grown up world's weight. But Bond never paints them as perfect angels rather he quietly admits their hunger and their pain with the narrowness of their lives yet still finds beauty in how they smile through all of it (Chacko & Sudhir, 2019).

4.2 Detha's Marginal Voices

Vijaydan Detha on the other hand hits directly into tradition the way a rebel might step into a temple not just to worship but to ask hard questions which one is not ready for where he talks openly about the patriarchy, caste, feudal power and the masks of religion that Ambedkar (1936) warned us about. His women and lower caste heroes don't beg for pity rather they argue by twisting the rules and sometimes using humour and even magic to strike back against it and in stories like *Duvidha* boundaries fade away and the people start choosing their worth instead of waiting for the someone else to define their worth. What's special is that Detha doesn't claim to speak for the subaltern rather than that he makes room for them to speak in their own songs or the way they prefer to.

As Orsini (2002, p. 142) notes, "the use of mimetic techniques allows the author to give voice to the views of the people in the market-place ... an expression of empowerment through literature." This idea aligns with what Spivak (1988) called for giving the subaltern a stage rather than being a saviour for them. And as Bowman and Stamp (2009) note from Rancièrian thought that Detha turns storytelling into politics by letting the excluded reclaim their right to speak and be seen and along with this his feminism isn't borrowed from Western books rather it's homegrown rising from the desert soil itself and shaped by the way women actually live and resist. His heroines rarely shout and they sting quietly by cutting through the patriarchy with humor and calm defiance and in their small rebellions Detha kind of builds a feminism born of live struggle rather than by theory turning daily life into something emotional or fierce.

5. Nature, Space, and Rural Imaginaries

Bond's world breathes in the cool Himalayan air where forests whisper and rivers wander like old friends telling stories. For him, nature isn't just a backdrop it's a companion, maybe even a gentle guide that keeps people grounded and kind. As Beniwal (2021, p. 118) states, "Bond's short stories have been written to narrate his views of the natural world and inspire humans to love nature with its wilderness." And definitely his writing moves at a calm rhythm that carries peace and it feels almost as though Bond is quietly teaching that stillness itself can be a kind of wisdom. Then there is Detha whose words rise from the fast moving sands of the Thar desert where the sun burns without the mercy and yet people somehow keep laughing and even showcases how in Rajasthan it breathes through ruined forts and narrow lanes through dry winds that sound like stories themselves and through small stubborn villages that refuse to disappear.

For him nature is not comfort rather it is a trial and the desert in his tales is not peaceful but fierce a place where courage keep people alive when nothing else can and through satire and sudden magic he transforms that harsh world into a living stage where gender class and power keep colliding under the unrelenting sun. Bond's hills soothe and Detha's desert stings yet both writers see the land as something alive as a being that feels speaks and shapes the destiny of human life.

6. Storytelling and form

6.1 Bond's Aesthetic

Bond's art holds a quiet honesty the kind that hides emotion beneath a soft, unhurried tone. His words move like evening talk with an old friend simple, gentle, and full of warmth drawn from everyday life. He writes in plain lines, but that simplicity gives his work a quiet glow. As Casanova (2004, p. 12) observes, "the most minute refinements of the linguistic norm were central preoccupations of a society where beauty of language was one of the chief ways of distinguishing oneself," and even when his tone feels still, it's never careless. Each phrase carries weight and rhythm, reaching the reader before they realize it. His restraint shows how plain words can reveal truth more deeply than fancy language ever could. The flow of his language builds a soft trust between writer and reader. The longer you stay, the more you sense that stillness hides beauty and that silence, somehow, speaks its own wisdom (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). His simplicity isn't a lack of craft but a quiet moral choice. By keeping language light, he lets meaning breathe. Each story becomes less an argument of intellect and more a reflection of heart. Bond's realism doesn't seek spectacle and it turns inward, searching for tenderness.

6.2 Detha's Aesthetic

Vijaydan Detha's storytelling moves with a completely different rhythm alive, talkative, full of laughter and shared memory (Bhagwat, 1972). His words rise and fall like folk songs under a starlit sky, passed from one fire to another. Every sentence feels touched by the warmth of oral tradition. There's rhythm, echo, and those sudden turns that wake you up. Detha takes old Rajasthani tales and reshapes them into mirrors that flash with both injustice and hope. What once seemed like simple folklore becomes alive with questions and rebellion. His stories wander, pause, and laugh at themselves yet somehow always find their way home.

As Blackburn (1968, p. 14) notes, "transmission and fruition of literary and literary-religious forms was chiefly oral," and reading him feels like sitting in a village courtyard where many voices rise at once. A joke turns serious, a pause opens truth, and laughter quietly melts into reflection (Handoo, 1987).

The world he builds feels ancient and yet brand new pulsing with defiance, wit, and wonder (Detha, 2007). His stories rarely close with clear endings. Instead they leave the reader thinking wondering and sometimes smiling at what was left unsaid. That may be his finest magic. He writes not to finish a story but to begin a conversation that continues long after. For Detha, storytelling is not something done alone. It is a shared act of imagination where laughter can become defiance and where fantasy itself becomes a quiet form of protest. Through his art the storyteller's circle becomes political without losing its joy. In that way he proves that narrative can be both rebellion and celebration at the same time. For him storytelling is never lonely. It is a shared act where laughter becomes resistance and imagination turns into a political force (Daimari 2003).

7. Gender identity and freedom

7.1 Bond

In Ruskin Bond's fiction women often hold the quiet center. They carry warmth endurance and an invisible kind of power that unfolds slowly. Characters such as Binya or Sita never wage loud wars yet their calm steadiness and moral clarity give shape to the world around them. They do not march into rebellion yet they keep families and communities together through their ability to feel and to forgive. Bond never writes manifestos of feminism but his pages give women the inner space that much of mainstream writing has ignored (Rivkin & Ryan 1998). As Mukherjee (2000, p. 47) notes, "women's subjectivity enters the narrative not through loud assertion but through the quiet persistence of emotion, memory, and everyday strength." His heroines do not reject oppression with noise. They resist through love through patience through that steady light that refuses to die (Ramamoorthi 1991).

7.2 Detha

Vijaydan Detha's universe feels completely different fierce and full of rebellion (Singh 2011). His women do not wait for permission. They step straight into the center of patriarchy and turn it upside down. Some wear the clothes of men some walk away from forced marriages some speak aloud their desires. Detha shows that gender is not fate but a structure built by society and therefore it can be broken apart and rebuilt (Daimari 2003). His feminism stands apart because it grows from within folklore itself not from theory (Bhagwat 1972). He bends old tales into new meanings until they laugh at authority and celebrate freedom. With humor irony and small sparks of magic he transforms rebellion into joy. Love in his world is not secret it is sacred because it gives identity and courage (Handoo 1987). His image of womanhood comes not from distant books but from the earth of Rajasthan itself. His heroines speak with fire and laughter. They are intelligent stubborn and alive. In them one can see a feminism shaped by dust wind and song rather than doctrine (Sen 2021).

8. Ethics and humanism

At the heart of both the writers Bond and Detha lies an unwavering belief in the goodness of human beings though they express it in very different voices (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996) as accordingly Bond's ethics bloom softly in acts of compassion and that of the thought while his stories whisper that kindness is a quiet rebellion that empathy can in its own slow way change everything but for the Detha morality is struggle and it is something earned through courage and confrontation and not gifted by comfort (Handoo 1987). His people fight to make justice real and ethics in his work is not an idea rather it is an action lived moment of defiance. As Casanova (2004, p. 118) observes, "dispossessed writers... subvert literary laws by inventing new forms that arise directly from political struggle," Bond's world heals through gentleness while that of Detha the world burns toward truth through resistance but still in the end both finally arrive at humanism one through peace the other through fire and yet both seek the same human goal dignity, compassion and the freedom to live meaningfully. Bond's morality grows like a seed in the misty stillness of the hills. Detha's bursts like a desert storm, wild and cleansing (Detha, 2007). For Bond, goodness is personal and spiritual; for Detha, it's political and collective (Sen, 2021). Together, they remind us that moral progress can come from softness or from fire from empathy or from revolt (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998)

9. Comparative insights

9.1 Points of Convergence

Both the Ruskin Bond and Vijaydan Detha are deeply rooted in their cultural and natural surroundings (Bindu, 2011). Their writings breathe empathy for the forgotten orphans, farmers, laborers, women and anyone on the margins. Both of them share a belief in human dignity, community, and justice. Both the writers push back against the restless speed of modern life that runs after power while forgetting how to feel and by holding on to their native tongues they resist a quiet kind of colonization that works inside the mind (Padmanabhan 2006). As Orsini (2002, p. 289) notes, "writing Hindi itself became a political act." Writing in the language of their own soil becomes their act of defiance and it definitely shows that freedom is not only about politics but also about keeping thought and culture alive and their work protects moral imagination and the deep sense of belonging that grows from land and memory shared across generations.

9.2 Points of Divergence

Their emotional landscapes however are far from alike and in this case Bond writes like the still air after rain and his tales drift through trees and hills filled with calm remembrance. His words heal rather than strike where he looks for peace and understanding not for rage. Detha walks through heat and fire and his stories directly cut with satire and rise from moral struggle. He does not only reveal injustice he pulls it apart through story itself (Desai 1980). Bond carries stillness Detha sparks awakening. Together they form two ends of India's moral breath one born from tenderness the other from defiance. Their contrast reminds us that India speaks many tongues of conscience peace protest reflection and revolt each holding its own kind of truth.

10. Socio-political contexts and literary production

10.1 Bond's Context The Post-Independence Himalayas

Bond's imagination grows out of a post-independence landscape where the hills began to change fast. Big dams and rising tourism broke the quiet rhythm of mountain life. He never preaches but his stories quietly question that idea of progress. For him nature is not backdrop it is guide and conscience (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996). His mixed Anglo-Indian roots place him both within and beyond India's story giving him eyes that notice yet do not condemn. Living close to the hills he writes about the forgotten the children the villagers the mute world of trees and streams that modernization leaves behind. His gentle words become acts of care preserving memory before it fades. The hills are not decoration they hold lessons about how people and earth still belong to one another.

10.2 Detha's Context Rajasthan's Feudal Transition

Detha's Rajasthan stands halfway between old feudal power and new democracy. India gained freedom but caste and patriarchy still ruled daily life. His stories strip away that illusion. He looks not at kings but at farmers women and workers who history usually ignores. By reshaping oral tales he turns folklore into a sharp mirror showing what power hides. Reviving the old becomes his way of fighting the unjust and it is a strategy with his writing which turns into moral action fierce but hopeful reminding us that imagination itself can be a challenge to oppression.

11. Conclusion

Bond and Detha both travel on the different paths but meet at a shared belief that stories can heal and awaken and where the Bond's words comfort Detha's words ignite the people from within on one end one brings calm belonging while the other courage and satire despite all this both of them see tradition as alive not as a relic holding creative and moral force. In an age drained by greed and division both of their works show how to stay human as Bond's quiet hills whisper of harmony while the Detha's deserts demand justice and both of them together teach that compassion and defiance can walk side by side keeping hope alive. Each story they tell becomes a small act of rebuilding the world.

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