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## A Narrative Inquiry: Author as a Narrator as Well as a Character in Ruskin Bond's Maharani

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### Abstract:

*Maharani is one of the most different and partly autobiographical work of Ruskin Bond. It is different because the author himself is performing a double role of Narrator as well as a character of his own. The opening lines of this novella "I think I am dying Ruskin, said by Neena Her- Highness , remains ambiguous . These words reveal the close relationship of author as a character with Neena , central character of the novel. "Maharani", published in 2012 by Ruskin Bond introduced a special narrative contingency that is different from his previous narrative styles, which is ethically directing him in a relation between self and other characters in the novel and thus, he loses his singularity as a narrator. This novel is special in the sense that he himself is playing a character of Ruskin bond and thus exterminating his position as a narrator but developing himself as a character. This paper is an attempt to investigate the technique of narration used by Bond and its effectiveness. The novel "Maharani" explores the vibrant but gloomy world of Neena H.H (her -highness) who is a spoilt, self obsessed, glamorous widow of the Maharaja of Mastipur. The novel is full of charm as the author writes about love, death, and explores friendship of melancholic Maharani with her old friend Ruskin. Playing a character himself is a considerable challenge to the self's singularity to accommodate an attractive narration throughout on his authors cost. But this kind of narrative is different from the typical narrative practices made by his contemporary and may be assumed as a radical challenge in existing narrative trends.*

### 1. Introduction

Ruskin Bond the eminent Indian Author, born in kausauli, Himachal Pradesh in 1934 is one of the finest storytellers in Indian fiction writers. His stories and novels are prescribed in school syllabus all over India. The unique feature of bonds writing is balanced, unbiased and simple tone that makes reader feel comfortable and connected with his characters.

Although, his art of narration is very simple and traditional but his approach to depict life of contemporary age is quite modern. He generally, begins his novels and stories by the description of the natural surroundings to build the atmosphere of the plot and then introduces the character.

*Maharani*, Published by Penguin Books in 2012 is one of the most innovative efforts by Bond from narrative perspective. The technique he has applied in this novella for narration of the story develops a unique narrative possibility for the writer to begin a relation between self and other characters in the novel. *Maharani* is a delightful novella based on the theme of love, death and friendship .It is partly fiction and partly real as confessed by the writer. This story is unique in the context of its art of narration because here, the author is playing the dual role of narrator as well as a character of his own.

The narrative revolves around "Her Highness Neena" who is the *Maharani* of Mastipur and her friendly relation with the author who himself is the second most important character in the novel. Bond's plots are very simple and revolve around one or two important characters. Basically, the narrator has based his theme on Maharani, her life and lifestyle as observed by him.

As the title suggests, the protagonist is a queen of Mastipur, the second wife and widow of Maharaja of Mastipur, for whom life is an everlasting party. Bond is her childhood friend not by his choice but by accident. "I think I'm dying Ruskin" these are the opening lines of the novel spoken by the melancholic queen in her sad moments which remains ambiguous throughout the novel and reveals the closeness of author with Neena (H.H).

Being very old and close friends they both as a character are contrast to each other and differ on various grounds. The character of bond in the novel is impoverished, but Maharani is prosperous, he is quite, she is noisy, he is solitary, she is societal. In spite of this disparity, acquaintance between H.H and Bond's character the relation amid them is rather strong. In a frank conversation between two, Maharani Quotes about Bond "The trouble with you, dear Ruskin is that you're too bloody happy. You're one of the life's failures. And that's why I'm quite fond of you". These lines also expose that Maharani is very distressed and melancholic in her personal life.

### 2. What is Narratology?

Before dealing with novels technicalities I would like to introduce some of the basic concepts of Narratology that will work as a toolbox in the analysis of this work.

Basically, the Literature is a verbal medium made up of words. So, technically it does not allow author to show but allows only telling.

Therefore, **Narration** means act of telling a story either in speech or in writing.

The **Narrator** is the story teller, someone who is a flesh and blood person, who can see us all, and can feel and hear too.

A **story** is a content of the text, sequences of different events, which is manifestation of the fabula.

A **fabula** is chronologically related events that are experienced by the characters of the story.

Coming back to narration of this text, the main narrator of Maharani is writer himself, who is narrating this partly fiction and partly real story of his own life and weird and wonderful relation with the spoilt queen and quotes "As our relationship had never been a physical one, she found it easy to confide in me – knowing I would not make any overt demands- demands on her money...or demands on her emotions..."

### 2.1. Narrative Technique of Maharani

In Maharani, Bond creates an exceptional world of characters again and offers a delightful journey. The central character of Neena H.H is one of the most spoilt, selfish, and indomitable of his all characters. Author refers her "Neena of nine lives" as he always convince her that she can never die, her passion for life is undying. Though she is a widow of Maharaja of Mastipur but still had many admirers old, new, from near and far places. Her character bears many shades in full journey of novel. Life is a celebration every moment for Maharani and party is the only tactic for her, but for his close friend Bond she is very depressed from inside as she is gloomy about her future. Maharani was actually a catastrophe on her personal front too. H.H.(Neena) was a failure as a mother of two of her spoiled son's who are good for nothing and hungrily waits for their inheritance. But Author was influenced by her weary charm and despite of disapproving many activities, tricks, and antics, he wasn't able to disconnect himself or his relations with Maharani.

The Mode of Narration applied by Ruskin Bond in the text of Maharani is First-person Narration throughout. The Narrative Mode simply refers to how a writer describes the plot and actions of the story or otherwise how he conveys the information to the readers or his audience. The most common type of modes applied in narration is First-person, Second-person, and Third-person narration.

#### 2.1.1. First-Person Narration

is followed when we read the story from the point of view of a character involved in that novel or story. He or she may or may not be the central protagonist but he is directly involved as a character. Such firsthand narration is First-person Narration.

In this mode, the Narrator frequently uses the pronoun "I," when he talks about him and use "We", when he refers himself with others, as he is discussing events of his own experience. In Maharani, Bond follows a first-person narration. He himself is the narrator although he is not the main protagonist but events and incidents referred by him are happening in his own life.

"A week or two later, in the first week of May, I paid another visit to H.H. at her Mussoorie home."

#### 2.1.2. Second Person Narrative

gives an account of a protagonist or any other main character by a second person personal pronoun like "You". Traditionally this form is less often used in fiction or story telling but this technique is widely employed in intermittent chapters or in song lyrics which tells a story.

Unlike in First Person Narration where the narrator is the character in the story, the Third Person Narrator does not describe his or her role in the story. It may be called as Point of view of omniscient or detached narrator who is not involved in the plot of action.

Some third person narrators describe the story from limited Point of View and others apply omniscient. It is one of the most common sorts of narration popularly used in fiction telling.

Depicting the narrative framework of Maharani, Bond follows First person narrative. This mode of narration is different from second-person Narrative in which narrator is free to use first person pronouns of You, me or I and can indicate his presence in the story. It gives readers to feel the acquaintance of the narrator and makes reader feel as one of the character in the story. Unlike first and third-person Narrative the second-person narrative is least commonly used by the writers.

The narrative style may also be analyzed by narrator's relationship with his presence and absence in the text term known as "relation criterion". This is helpful in determining the mode of the text that how to present, whether in first person narrative or third person narrative.

- **Homodiegetic Narrative**, (inside the text) when the story is told by a narrator who himself playing a character in the story. The term Homodiegetic made of (prefix homo-same individual who acts as a narrator is also performing as a character on action level and Diegetic means pertaining to narrating.
- In **Heterodiegetic narrative**,(outside the text) the story is told by the narrator who is not present as a character in the story. He is different in nature as compared to any and all of the story characters. So, one of the most important factor in determining the type of narrative is to first check the presence and absence of an experiencing I.

### 3. Advantages of First Person Narration in Maharani

Bond has chosen this narrative as it gives him great opportunity to *get really close to his characters of the novel* and to win the trust of his readers by making them believe the authenticity of the incidents witnessed. Also he has introduced many minor characters around and in the life of maharani. One of the important character is of *Recardo Montbalan*, the South American diplomat, who is deeply madly and blindly in love with the maharani. How deep Recardo was in love with maharani is not quite clear but he was clearly failed in his duties towards his wife and two children. They all were under strict guardianship of

maharani's authoritarian caretaker Hans. So that they may not cause any interruption in the love game of Maharani and their father Recardo.

Bond is very keen observer; he noticed the pain and loneliness of Pablo, son of Recardo in absence of his father and therefore spends a lot of time with him to fulfill that gap by trust and companionship. Bond is master in characterization but he logically places each flat and round character of his novel to get an insight of the central characters minds.

Another huge benefit of applying first-person narration is that readers get great opportunity to get closer to the narrator who is telling them story. This is one of the major reasons for large readership of Ruskin Bond. At so many occasion author (narrator)is direct conversation with readers "*Sometimes I couldn't help feeling Neena's mission in life was to make life as unpleasant as possible for all those who had any claim on her purse or affection*".

Using first person point of view is certainly not easy but it is most natural voice to use in fiction. It makes narration more reliable probably because we use it all the time in our daily life .It strikes as being altogether and more straightforward. It gives readers smooth and free flow platform to go along the course of action without making any tricky shifts from one voice to another.

#### 4. Conclusion

This novel is truly for them who understand the reality of life and significance of relationships. The text is full of wonderful natural descriptions of princely state of Mussorie and mix of English Hindi and Spanish .It easily transport us to the typical old world setup of love, friends, humor and emotions .The final journey of maharani touches our heart a lot though she was so feudal and outspoken and thoroughly believed in inequality of people and nation and always wanted to rule people around her. Life of Neena was a long party and therefore she was so frightened in her last moment .Altogether the novel explores the large number of recurrent themes for Ruskin Bond's regular readers that forms a charming journey.

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