

Human Sensitivity and Ecology in the Novels of Ruskin Bond

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ABSTRACT

Every human being acquires knowledge through various experiences of 'nature'. Even just a passive observation of nature gives knowledge. The sea, sand, mountains, rivers, plants, animals, climate, temperature and seasons influence the character and thinking of a person. Environment influences persons and inspires them to live ecologically. The emotional attachment and commitment to a place influences a person's experience and shapes his personality. Eco-criticism is concerned with nature writing and ecological themes in all literature. The preservation of nature has always been a prime concern since the Vedic Times in India and the early Greek thought. Ruskin Bond's works portray one of the aspects of eco-criticism – the role of diversity and its connection with the environment's network structure. Diversity means many different relationships in a community which is aware of the interdependence of all its members. The entire amount of Bond's works is a magnificent document of his deep association with environment. He finds delight in running with the winds, smiling with the flowers and converses with the trees.

1. Introduction

Ruskin Bond is a well-known Indian writer in English, who wrote in the light of his own experiences and fond impressions about things and people which had a lasting effect on him and is reflected in his works. He is sober by temperament that affected his life-style. He is polite and a highly adjustable personality. He takes up serious themes for his stories but they are not dull, because he makes them interesting to attract the common reader.

Ruskin Bond's novels are an outcome of his own experiences and therefore he represents his age. His early novels are based on his boyhood experiences like the "Room on the Roof". His stories of the middle period reflect his wide experience of life of the middle-class people. He also discusses social problems and offers solutions related to them. His later novels are more mature and perfect. He adorns his novels with Symbols and Images borrowed from The World of Nature. In many of his novels, Ruskin Bond's characters feel a spiritual affinity with nature through a single manifestation of nature. Whether it is a cherry tree, a rain drop, a window on the roof from which to view the world, a hidden pool, or an old banyan tree, a single facet serves as a symbol of harmony with nature and a transcendental vision of life. Ruskin Bond is a lover of nature who at first left England to settle in India, then left Delhi to live in the lap of nature, and never went far from it; Professor Iffat Ara writes about his dwelling in Mussoorie, in an article entitled 'Ruskin Bond- A Gleaming Star' to this effect:

2. Man-Nature Relationship in Ruskin Bond's Sequel Novels

Every human being acquires knowledge through various experiences of 'nature'. Even just a passive observation of nature gives knowledge. The sea, sand, mountains, rivers, plants, animals, climate, temperature and seasons influence the character and thinking of a person. Environment influences

persons and inspires them to live ecologically. The emotional attachment and commitment to a place influences a person's experience and shapes his personality. Lawrence Buell defines Eco-criticism in 'The Future of Environmental Criticism' as "the environmentally oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice" (138). He identifies two phases of Eco-criticism the "first wave Eco-criticism" and "the second wave Eco-criticism" or "Revisionist Eco-criticism". The first wave writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction". While first-wave eco-critics upheld the philosophy of organism, the second wave eco-critics inclined towards environmental justice issues and a "Social Eco-criticism" that takes urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as natural landscapes. (Buell 22). Ultimately Buell, acknowledges the fact that western academy focuses on Eco-criticism only as "environmental criticism" Eco-criticism is concerned with nature writing and ecological themes in all literature. The preservation of nature has always been a prime concern since the Vedic Times in India and the early Greek thought. As an academic discipline, it began in the 1992's although its origins go back to the late 1970's, when at the meetings of the Western Literature Association, a body whose field of interest is the literature of the American West, arose the concept of Eco-criticism and what Eco-criticism signifies. Prior to the emergence of environmental literary studies as an academic field in the late 1980's, there was no discourse of Eco-criticism. It appeared as a general discourse of nature writing. The early Eco-criticism seems to have been prompted only indirectly by environmentalism itself. Because, it is a new area of study, scholars are still engaged in defining the scope and aims of the subject. As an emerging discipline, Eco-criticism still does not have a widely known set of assumptions, doctrines or procedures.

Bond found emotional compensation in the warm lap of nature. After his father's tragic demise, Bond found the hills kind enough to provide him a formidable sense of parental

security. He could feel mountains flowing in his blood. The trees and plants around him also assumed the role of a guardian spirit. They appeared to be the shaping spirit of his dear father. Here, Nature emerges as a great healing force to dissipate his gloom and Loneliness. Nature becomes a powerful means of defying death and redeeming his sense of loss. It is an affirmation of bond between man and nature. Nature in a therapeutic style helps Bond to emerge out of his personal grievances.

Nature acts as an emotional counterpart for the sensitive souls. It acts in dual role for Bond. It provides him new themes and background for his stories. At the same time, it charges and refreshes his creative vigour. In the exhaustive process of writing a novel, even a tiny bird, or a flower outside his window freshens him profusely. It recharges his creative spirit. The clattering of rain drops, the warbling of birds, the rippling and gurgling of brooks, the whispering of plants and the dancing summer breeze radiate his fiction with an exquisite softness. Even the occasional hurdles of writing process are removed by the benign influence of nature.

Bond's characters are also drawn from that section of society who lives in close association with nature. They are small farmers, shopkeepers, tonga drivers, gardeners, retired persons. The distinctive mark of Bond's characters is their primeval innocence, simplicity and purity. They represent life's finest attribute and ability to find happiness and contentment in everyday events. They get strengthened in the company of nature.

Bond's association with birds, animals, insects are like that of a naturalist. By his long association he has acquired a unique understanding of their habits. The charm of tiny creatures like, butterflies, caterpillars, beetles, squirrels, bluejaya, is irresistible. Even lizards, leeches, objects of general repulsion are closely observed. His microscopic eye does not spare a single living creature around him. Like a biologist, Bond records a photographic story of their ways and habits Nature emerges as a powerful background conveying the spirit of the story. Bond is skilled in painting world landscapes in accordance to the motif of the plot. Nature highlights the character also. Nature herself dominates the course of life.

Bond's attitude to nature begins from the simple sensory delights and culminates into humanism. His fiction gently brings us back to nature in order to regain our primitive innocence and faith.

Among four major foreign novelists –Kipling, Forster, Myers, and John Master who scribbled about India, Kipling tried his best to know this country. For Kipling, India is a land of fakirs, sadhus, sanyasies and mullahs of different faiths with lots of ruggedness.

3. Ruskin Bonds comparative study and his works impeccable impression on human society

Bond portrays the social evils that wreck the lives of his characters. Bereft of money, the most essential commodity for primary human existence, these hapless villagers unwittingly fall

prey to all forms of exploitation and social abuse. Forced by circumstances, they accept their subjugation with calm stoicism. They are often deprived of fundamental human rights and denied basic human dignity. Yet they put up with their life of servitude and its accompanying humiliations and injustices with passive resignation. In "Dead Man's Gift", the impoverished villagers of Ahirpur are lured into the enticing monetary trap of Lala P.am Das, the village money-lender. Like Shylock in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice", Lala is not content till he has extracted his "pound of flesh" from this wretched village folk. Powerless to extricate themselves from his vicious debt trap, they allow themselves to be exploited and turned into veritable slaves to appease him.

Bond shows the hopelessly trapped condition of these villagers in debt. His basic humanism is revolted by this vicious system of usury rampant in Indian society. He launches a frontal attack on Lala Ram Das, and other human leeches like him, who drain the life-blood out of our society. His revulsion stems from his abhorrence to all forms of exploitation and is traceable in his deep compassion for fellow-men.

Bond castigates this deplorable erosion of human values and sympathises with the unfortunate rustics, who endure pain with patience and fortitude often looking towards heaven for the alleviation of their suffering and misery. Thus he realizes the importance of education in a country like India where poverty, untouchability, casteism etc. continue to hold sway. Education not only helps in the molding of human personality but it facilitates the exercise of judgment and responsibility necessary for eradication of these social evils.

4. Cinematic representation of novels of Ruskin Bond

Bonds cinematic works are entirely based on real life incidents and feelings. His vision of childhood, his affinity with nature, his respect for values and gentler virtues, his inoffensive neglect of vices, his sympathy for animals and pets, his taste for eternal music from the varied aspects of Nature, his historical and cultural sense as one radiates from innocence to experience, his touches of good humor and gentle irony and above all his truly religious attitude are the aspects that matter most in his literature and are going to be probed in the present thesis. These articulate the inherent spiritual tendency of his mind and art.

The literature of Ruskin Bond is a harmonious combination of the tales of innocence and the ceremonies of experience. It is an attempt to rouse the world to the delight of the 'Unseen Player', to set the reader in tune with the dance of life itself. The noblest aim of art and literature has been to realize and communicate the essential joy and immortality of the truth. Bond like a true artist and an ascetic sees the vision, of the paradise in the sunlight and the green of the earth, in the beauty of the human face and the wealth of human life, even in objects that are seemingly insignificant. Like Bruno, one of the great Italian Romantics, and also as given in *Bhagwada Gita* Bond seems to believe that 'all reality is one in substance, one in cause, one in origin, and God and this reality are one. As an artist he has been striving consistently through his writings to

unravel this mystery about God, nature, human beings and the world. By attempting to perceive and suggest unity in diversity.

The Black Cat, a short film (19 minutes, 56 seconds) directed by Bhargav Saikia, is a cocktail of fantasy and mystery. Replete with old world charm, it stars late actor Tom Alter as Ruskin Bond and Shernaz Patel as Miss Bellows, the witch. The charming film opens in an artfully messy store that stocks everything from clocks to books, and ceramics to broomstick

The 1978 Bollywood film *Junoon* is based on Bond's historical novella *A Flight of Pigeons* (about an episode during the Indian Rebellion of 1857). It was produced by Shashi Kapoor and directed by Shyam Benegal. The Rusty novels have been adapted into Doordarshan TV series *Ek Tha Rusty*. Several novels have been incorporated in the school curriculum in India, including *The Night Train at Deoli*, *Time Stops at Shamli* and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. In 2005, the Bollywood director Vishal Bhardwaj made a film based on his popular novel for children, *The Blue Umbrella*. The movie won the National Award for Best Children's film.

Ruskin Bond made his maiden big screen appearance with a cameo in Vishal Bhardwaj's film *7 Khoon Maaf* in 2011, based on his short story *Susanna's Seven Husbands*. Bond appears as a Bishop in the movie with Priyanka Chopra playing the title role.[9] Bond had earlier collaborated with Bharadwaj in *The Blue Umbrella* which was also based on one of his works.

The Blue Umbrella is a 1980 Indian novel written by Ruskin Bond. It was adapted into 2005 Hindi film by the same name, directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, which later won the National Film Award for Best Children's Film

5. Human relationship with special reference to the most important novels of Ruskin Bond

Bond's novels display human feelings like affection, care, kind heartedness, insecurities, sorrow, and disgust. As his art is often referred to as autobiographical, his characters are real and we can find them in our neighborhood. He describes the poor, middle class men and women who have their own way of life. He writes about beggars, villagers and even thieves. He studies their attitude, behavior as well as relationships with other fellow being. He points out that every human being whether a thief, sweeper or a beggar has a sense of honor, virtue and self-respect. Bond, therefore, loves humanity.

During a major period of growth in the movement for humane treatment of physically challenged people, "The Eyes Have It" became the work that represented the movement. It is not only the primary mode of transportation of feeling; it has also become a symbol or myth for light. It shares the need for new learning to learn about good care of physically challenged and marginalized people. Bond's creative format most effectively voices his concerns because it appeals to a large audience. The narrator of *The Eyes Have It*, is blind who on his way to Dehradun meets a girl. Once the train leaves the station, he picks up a conversation with her and quite boldly tells her that she had an appealing face. She giggles and responds that it was undoubtedly a wanted eccentricity from the repetitive

phrase: "You have a pretty face". The story ends on a shocking note for the narrator when the girl departs and another passenger enters into the compartment and tells him, "She had beautiful eyes- but they were of no use to her. She was completely blind".

6. Ruskin Bonds comparative study and his works impeccable impression on human society

Bond castigates this deplorable erosion of human values and sympathizes with the unfortunate rustics, who endure pain with patience and fortitude often looking towards heaven for the alleviation of their suffering and misery. Thus he realizes the importance of education in a country like India where poverty, untouchability, casteism etc. continue to hold sway. Education not only helps in the molding of human personality but it facilitates the exercise of judgment and responsibility necessary for eradication of these social evils. Though English by birth.

Bond "grew up as an Indian with no division of loyalties". His heart bleeds for the little children of our country who are denied the opportunity of learning the three R s. While it is true that our Constitution guarantees free education to all children up to the age of 14, yet few can avail of this opportunity. A large number of Indian villages lack the infrastructure of even a primary school. In "The Panther's Moon", the children of Manjari do not attend school as this remote mountain village has no center of education. Like other children born and bred in penury, these children too are engaged in manual labour to augment the family's meager income.

Busy counting their gains to bother about the idols of their youth".^ And herein lies their tragedy. When Hasan (in "The Garland On His Brow") gives up a promising career in wrestling to become the promiscuous Rani's paramour and bodyguard, he hardly realizes the heavy price he would have to pay for this choice. His fortunes plummet and his life takes a turn for the worse when the Rani suddenly expires. Without the Rani's indulgent support, he suddenly finds himself without money or employment. He returns once again to the professional testling arena. But age and good living having already taken their toll on his body, Hasan finds himself hopelessly inadequate to meet the challenges of the new young professionals and he is defeated again and again. His spirits break. Hurt and humiliated he finally withdraws from the ring altogether. Ill-equipped for other professions, it is not before long, that this rejected wrestler finds himself on the streets. Acute poverty drives him to beg on the streets of Dehra.

Bond is also fascinated by the diversity, vibrancy and vigour of life. He accepts the sublime and the sordid, the pleasures and pains, the joys and sorrows that make up life. His catholicity of outlook makes him espouse the cause of the weak and the oppressed underdogs of our society. In "Most Beautiful" he reaffirms his genuine human response to love and compassion through his highly sensitive portrayal of the character of Suresh, the young retard. His basic humanism enables him to penetrate the veneer of physical grotesqueness to the noble heart trapped within a hopelessly deformed bodies.

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