

Ruskin Bonds Relationship with nature

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ABSTRACT

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. Biodiversity impacts human health in a number of ways, both positively and negatively. It is the concern of every country to replenish the diminishing factors of 'ecology' which is defined as the way in which plants, animals and people are related to each other and their environment, which threatens human beings the most. At the dawn of the new millennium, the whole globe is facing serious ecological crisis. The most urgent issues like global warming, chronic resource shortage, rainforest destruction, and species extinction indicate the "end of nature". Myriads of physical as well as mental problems are emerging due to the environmental crisis. If we wish to pass on a safe and healthy world to children then protection of environment will be the issue of immediate concern.

1. Introduction

Bond has experimented with the traditional Indian art of storytelling and European impressionism in order to impart innocence and richness to narration. Bond's sense of loneliness in early childhood, loss of parental care and love, trauma of belongingness, escapades to the world of books, nature and children-all expressed in the form of stories and novels

Nature nurtures children who become adults who nurture nature. The experiences with nature play a unique and irreplaceable role in healthy child development says Peter Kahn and Kellert Stephen in "Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations". The early experiences with nature are vital to the forging of later environmental commitments. Children possess a special competence with respect to the natural world and they have a special responsiveness or resonance to the world of nature. The outdoor experiences exerted impacts in their personality and character development. Stories of Bond put lights on the relationship between children and nature and the impact of nature on adolescents, adults and children and their response towards nature.

Literature and nature have a close relationship in the works of writers of all ages. At present the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all areas of knowledge. The relationship between nature and society has been textualized by two terms ecology and ecocriticism. India is a country with variety of ecosystems and

it has been affected due to increasing population and avarice of mankind. The concern for nature changes Indian literature from destruction to reverence. Bond has the same concern and reverence for nature. He expresses it in his works, where his writings idea with beauty and power of nature. His

concern for ecology and the threat that the continuous misuse of our environment in literature places his works a new branch of literary theory, ecocriticism. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty explains that ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.

Bond has written many novels. Though he brings a vivid picture of the Himalaya yet he deals with different aspects of this region – from natural beauty to recent environmental degradation. I have selected following three short stories here for the eco-critical analysis in this paper: *Dust on the Mountains*, *Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright* and *The Last Tonga Ride*.

The story *Dust on the Mountain* narrates how money-mongers lure simple, hill people. The story unravels the sordid picture of the 'green' massacre: There were trees here once, but the contractors took the deodars for furniture. And the pines were trapped to death for resin, and the oaks were stripped of their leaves to feed cattle. The narrator relates the death of trees to the painful death of his own brother in an accident. It was just coming into its own this year, now cut down in its prime youth like my young brother on the road to Delhi last month: both victim of roads, the tree killed by P.W.D., my brother by a truck.

Dust on the Mountain focuses on Bisnu, a boy, whose search for job enabled him to learn the importance of trees. His place is shown as such to receive no rainfall. This is again the outcome of ruthless deforestation. The campers make a fire and forget to extinguish it which sometimes becomes the cause of huge fire. This way, thousands of Himalayan trees perished in the flames. Oaks, deodars, maples, pine trees that had taken centuries to grow got ruthlessly damaged and destroyed in the fire. There was no one to extinguish it. It takes days to die down by itself. Due to this carelessness on people's part, many valuable trees are lost. Though such incidents are common on the Himalayas yet people have not learnt the lesson and fail to

do their duty without realizing that it is they who are going to be affected of such acts.

The sight of ravaged hills is so pathetic that no bird comes to warble. Thousand-year-old rocks are blown by dynamite. Their dust is stifling trees, grass, shrubs and flowers far and wide. Horn of the truck and dynamite explosions toll the knell of death and disaster in the hills. Dryness caused tremendous decrease in production of food and fruits. Hence, Bisnu went to town to earn. After working at a tea stall, Bisnu and his friend Chitru went to a quarry to find work. Chitru had already been there unfortunately when the place was full of wild strawberries for which he used to come, but now except a few skeletons of trees everything else had gone. As they approached the quarries, a blast shook the hillside which explains the disappearance of the trees. One day when Pritam, the truck driver, had met with an accident on the mountain road, it was a tree which had saved him from death. After this incident both – Pritam and Bisnu – realized, "It's better to grow things on the land than to blast things out of it". While returning home to work on their own land, they understood the significance of growing trees and safeguarding not only their own essence but also posterity.

One should not misconstrue Bond as being against development. He is not blind to the grimace of life, but he is deadly against the thoughtless pursuit of materialism at the cost of environment. He earnestly pleads to save the green layer of the earth. The relationship of man and tree is revealed through the ancient belief, A blessing rests on the house where falls the shadow of a tree⁷. Trees are the manifestation of god's benediction. For youngsters they are the playmate and for the elders the sharer of their joys and sorrows. They preserve the lost gems of childhood and youth. Trees are the archetypes of friendship. This relationship is completely free from the stylistic ways of other worldly relationships.

Besides flora, Bond in many of his documentary-cum-stories, focuses upon the extinction of tigers and leopards. He strongly opines that tiger and other animals are not so dangerous as man of the plain thinks of them. Bond's compassion and understanding of the wild animals, and in particular, man's close relationship with them is part of his vision of life and therefore it is something to be felt and experienced.

This wonder and wild essence of the world of animals has been captured with deep empathy in the story of an old, wise and crafty tiger who has survived all attempts on his life in *Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright*. The tiger comes fully alive in the detailed sympathetic description in the story: Although the tiger had passed the prime of his life, he had lost none of his majesty. His muscles rippled beneath the golden yellow of his coat, and he walked through the long grass with the confidence of one who knew that he was still a king, even though his subjects were fewer. His great head pushed through the foliage, and it was only his tail, swinging high, that showed occasionally above the sea of grass.

Such vivid sketch of the wild fearful creature could have been drawn only by someone like Ruskin Bond, a genuine lover of nature. As if to prove the all pervading communion of the

creations of God, Bond discloses that the tiger in the above mentioned story is full of understanding and kindness for the little boy Ramu. While wandering in the forest Ramu climbs a Mahua tree and starts plucking the flowers, throwing them to the ground. But presently he is not alone. A young bear appears perhaps by sensing the smell of the flower. The bear laying himself on a branch of the tree soon sees Ramu, and as it is, like most animals, the bear also is afraid of the man. The startled bear tumbled out of the tree, dropped through the branches for a distance of some fifteen feet, and landed with a thud in a heap of dry leaves. But within a few seconds, the boy Ramu who was hardly afraid and full of laughter for the young bear, is in the vicinity of the mother bear. However, the old tiger who is asleep in the nearby bush not far away, bounds towards the spot. He was in a bad mood, and his loud-'A-Oonh!' made his displeasure quite clear. The bear turned and ran...

Thus the tiger rescues Ramu, and saves his life. Later, when the old tiger's life is in danger, due to the arrival of hunters, Ramu feels that he owes his life to the tiger, warns him of the impending doom hovering over his life, by circling the area, and hanging up bits and pieces of old clothing on small trees and bushes. The unknown bond between Ramu and the tiger, i.e., in other words the unseen sacred bond between human and wild life as also the mutual suspicion between man and the beast is beautifully brought out in this kind act of Ramu.

Nature's harmony encompasses all creatures, great and small, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak, and Bond accepts the ultimate truth of nature with humility. Such sensuousness with which Bond loves life in various forms and loves nature in myriad configurations is evident in all his writings. Stories hang about Bond that his plots and characters pour out of his routine walks. He enjoys the sight of pebbles in the clear stream and portrays his joy in the writings. Such scenes have a perfect harmony, though transient, yet permanent; though sensory, yet spiritual. This association has been reflected in myriad forms. Bond's absolute perception is a part of his spiritual awakening, which he recalls in his memoir passionately. In one of his columns in *The Telegraph* he recapitulates the precious moment.

India is bestowed with variety of ecosystems ranging from Himalayas in the North to plateaus in the South and the mystic Sunder bans in the East to the Thar in the West. India is a country full of forests, rivers, varieties of wildlife and other species. From the very beginning Indian novelists were inclined towards nature and an intimate relationship between human and nature has been indicated. Environmental problems have become global issue in the contemporary scenario and literature reflects this issue very seriously with the help of ecocriticism. Nature is both a preserver and a destroyer but negligence of nature and its exploitation brings destruction to mankind. Environmental problems affect the people across the globe in a similar manner. Novels of Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Kamla Markandya, Ruskin Bond, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai and Amitav Ghosh expose a deep interconnectedness and interdependence of man and nature. In the earlier works of Indian fiction the true essence of ecocriticism is missing as they just focus on the scenic beauty of nature, its limited to the

landscape and changes that occurred with time at particular places.

When one turns the pages of history one finds description of nature, its scenic and aesthetic beauty in works of Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Ruskin Bond. Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* describes Kanthapura as a province situated high on the ghats facing cool Arabian Sea, up the Malabar Coast. Villagers of Kanthapura pray to a hill and consider it as their goddess Kenchamma and say "Kenchamma is our goddess. Great and bounteous is she...never has she failed us in grief. If rains come out, you fall at her feet and say, 'Kenchamma you are not kind to us. Our field is full of younglings.'" (*Kanthapura* 2). Raja Rao presented the age old relationship between man and nature i.e. divine element of nature.

Human being worships nature since ancient times either in form of sun, moon, fire, trees or mountains which is showcased in *Kanthapura*. R.K.Narayan in his novels used landscapes as important themes. In *The Guide*, Saryu river, the ruined temples influenced Raju, the drought and then the final rainfall are equally significant. In *The English Teacher*, Krishna is affected by the serene nature becomes deeply spiritual and begins to communicate with Sushila's soul. Ruskin Bond was the real lover of nature, observing nature was enough for him. His dominant theme was environment and ecology.

One finds pantheistic philosophy of Wordsworth in Ruskin Bond that is presence of life or spirit in every object of nature like trees, plants, rivers and others. Nature is present in its full vibrant, colourful, soothing and peaceful appearance in Bond's novels. His novels emphasize the local colour of Himalayan (Dehradun and Mussoorie) region stressing on the ambiance including the beautiful forests, scenic beauty, cascading rivers along with the dialects, customs, faith and frustration of simple minded folks of that region. Indianness is always visible, his description of nature is authentic and like an environmentalist he is concerned for nature and presents varied moods of protagonist through its wild and mild aspect (showcasing love, loss, pain, happiness, struggle etc.) all in all he focuses on humanity.

2. Conclusion

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Today the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all departments of knowledge and development. The literary critic tries to study how this close relationship between nature and society has been textualized by the writers in their works. In this context two terms have become very important today – ecology and Eco criticism. India is a country with variety of ecosystems which ranges from Himalayas in the north to plateaus of south and from the dynamic Sunderbans in the east to dry Thar of the West. With time, however, these ecosystems have been adversely affected due to increasing population and avarice of mankind. Literature could not remain unaffected from this depletion and my paper is on that how the concern for nature changes in Indian literature from reverence to destruction. The two components of nature, organisms and their environment are not only much complex and dynamic but also interdependent, mutually reactive and interrelated. Ecology relatively a new science, deals with the various principles which govern such relationships between organisms and environment.

Today ecology is defined as the way in which plants, animals and people are related to each other and their environment. In this relationship they are so much interdependent on each other that any disturbance in one disturbs the other. History has proved this every now and then that with every change in the civilization the relationship of animals and human beings have also changed and the effect on civilisation of the changes in environment has been so acute that sometimes it has wiped the whole civilisation from the face of the earth. Therefore, concern for ecology is one of the most discussed issues today. It is the concern of every country to replenish the diminishing factors of ecology which threatens human beings the most.

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