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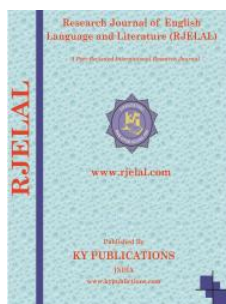
A STUDY OF NATURE IN RUSKIN BOND'S WRITINGS

Dr. SONIYA VERMA¹, Prof RAVI K DHAR²

¹Assistant Professor- Raj Kumar Goel Institute of Technology, Ghaziabad

²Professor & Director- Jagannath International Management School, Delhi

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ABSTRACT

This study has been undertaken to explore and assess the style of Ruskin Bond's short stories on Nature. Any assessment of Ruskin Bond as a Nature Lover must necessarily go into the genre of his short story writing as it has evolved the scent of Himalayan Region. Bond's imageries and sensuousness are not overshadowed by any symbolic representation of nature. They grow as a result of his love for and commitment to nature. He does not crush the spontaneity of nature imageries by associating it with double layer of meaning or a display of his learning. Beautiful and sensational vibes of nature stirs him that he loves to share with his readers.

Key words: Nature, Himalayan Region, Exploration, Imagination

Introduction

Ruskin Bond, who has been living in Mussoorie for over thirty years, has made the Himalayas a part of his life and work as a writer. He finds endless material for stories in the trees and wild flowers, birds and animals, rocks and rivers, and simple hill folk who are an essential part of the mountains. Through his poems, essays, works of fiction and autobiographical writings for young children, Bond explores his own and his protagonists' changing relationship with the Himalayas from the freedom of childhood to a deep love and communion with various manifestations of nature.

Discussions

In the journal, *Rain in the Mountains*¹, he glorifies the mountains and the mountainous peaks with a passion. Ruskin Bond is an Indian author who, although he writes in English, is not very well known outside of India. This however doesn't seem to bother him and he remains content to write short stories set in small towns in his beloved Himalayan

foothills; this collection is fairly representative of his work. With the Imagination of the fragrance of freshly drenched earth, his short story *Rain in the Mountain* is one such a book which feels like a dozen of tranquilizer. A collection of prose and poetry from Mr. Bond's Life, It details 30 years of his time spent in the hills, amongst his close friends, nature and his adopted family. His writing traces his path back to India. The writing once again is simple, elegant and nudges us toward taking some time off from our busy lives and to know the simple people of the hills.

In this journal, he writes of leopards padding down the lanes of Mussoorie after dark, the first shower of the monsoon in Meerut that brings with it a tumult of new life, the chorus of insects at twilight outside his window, ancient banyan trees and the short-lived cosmos flower, a bat who strays into his room and makes a night less lonely. This volume proves, yet again, that for the serenity and lyricism of his prose and his sharp yet sympathetic eye, Ruskin Bond has few equals. Once again this

writer from Mussoorie captivates with his collection of nature pieces Sunday Middyay.

Ruskin Bond, the old man of the mountains², came to live in Mussoorie in 1963 after many frustrating years in the plains. As he is fond of natural beauty, he depicts the charm of nature and its loveliness. His stories are generally set in a small, lonely Himalayan town or village which still retains its "inherited values of basic honesty, faith and love for the family and neighbors". Parents do not worry about the safety of their children who roam freely without fear of brutality or crime because people from the hills are quick to smile, hospitable, and trusting. Against such a kind atmosphere, Bond envisions his own and his protagonists' childhood as a long summer afternoon of gaiety, play, and carefree abandon. His characters swim in forest pools, take naps under shady trees with butterflies and beetles humming lazily overhead, climb mango and lichi trees, ride bicycles down steep hills and explore river and mountain paths. The timeless, magical atmosphere of the hill station in summer or during vacation quickly envelops his stories.

In the autobiographical *Once Upon a Monsoon Time*³, he narrates an episode about the trees he planted with his father in a dry riverbed in Dehra Dun just before his father's death. When he returned to the same scene after returning from England, the trees had multiplied and seemed to whisper a greeting to him. The protagonist and his father plant trees on a rocky island in a dry riverbed, hoping that the saplings will be left alone and those floods will not wash them away. In *My Father's Trees in Dehra*⁴, the protagonist is now an adult revisits this spot and amazed that the trees are thriving and that his father's dream has been realized. Such images of trees and creeping vines moving toward his father and grandfather in an attempt to communicate appear repeatedly in his poem, essays, and short stories. Bond believes that trees could once walk about like people till someone cast a spell on them and rooted them in one place. He looks forward to the time when trees will be able to walk again freely. This is quite obviously a metaphor for the senseless devastation of trees in the Himalayan region. Bond pleads that trees are important to the birds and animals who live in the

forests, as well as to humans for fruit and timber, for attracting rain, and for preventing soil erosion and keeping the desert away.

Bond inclination to the world of nature has much to do with his long rooting to Mussoorie, a place of beauty and reading of Henry David Thoreau, Richard Jefferies, H. E. Bates "who lived close to nature and made it part of their creative work"⁵. Bond's childlike curiosity extends itself to a complex animistic understanding of the mastermind loci of the Himalayan foothills. He speaks to Nilima Pathak on communing with nature:

For me nature is very personal. That's because I have lived very close to it up in the mountains for the last 35 years. But even before that I was quite in kinship with forests and the general flora of the country. In India, and particularly in the Hindu religion, there's a very strong element of nature. In my case, I feel since I've lived so close to it, the influence shows in my work. Many of my books and stories have for the last many years had the strong element of the natural world.⁶

In his Ruskin Bond's *Book of Nature* he gives detailed description of trees, its usage, effect on people, association with daily chores of life and the myths associated with it. He pays compliment to the trees for shaping his whole being. His lonely and stressful life brightens up by the benign presence of trees. He says as long as he is "aware of their presence" he can "try to avoid the trivial and the banal". He evokes them by calling "the guardians of my conscience". He also accepts the fact that trees are his best critics and he lives and works under "the generous but highly principled supervision of the trees". He spans the horizon of our knowledge by enumerating the account of the structure of trees, its roots, branches, flowers, leaves.⁷

In *The Cherry Tree* Bond narrates the feeling of Rakesh as Rakesh plants a cherry tree and cares for the loving sapling through its difficult first year when a goat eats it and then a grass cutter cuts it in two; yet, the sturdy tree grows to full maturity over the year and bears fruit. Birds, cicadas, and bees visit it as often as Rakesh and grandfather do. While Rakesh is proud and amazed at his special

tree, so he become aware of the love with which grandfather is raising Rakesh. Like the tree, Rakesh has also grown taller and stronger and can help his father in the fields, but a loving, nurturing relationship binds him grandfather.

Watering the plants by Bond's characters even though it rains is a recurring feature of his stories. This emphasizes the importance of personal communication with nature. The story advocates Bond's belief that the presence of God and his power on earth could be sensed through trees. The majestic shape of the tree starts from a tiny seed into a sapling, into a plant and finally a tree: "Just one small seed," said Rakesh, and he touched the smooth bark of the tree that had grown. He ran his hand along the run of the tree and put his finger to the tip of a leaf. 'I wonder,' he whispered. 'Is this what it feels to be God?'⁸. The magnificence of trees reminds Bond the presence of God on the earth. The tiny creatures' perfect body structure reminds him God's fine creation. In *Landour Days*, Bond describes a small fly and its superbly crafted structure: "The smallest insect in the world is a sort of fairy fly and its body is only a fifth of a millimeter long. One can only just see it with the naked eye. Almost like a speck of dust, yet it has perfect little wings and little combs on its legs for preening itself. That is perfection".⁹

In *Kitmaker*, Bond bemoans the ravages of "development" which has turned once a lively city into a contested metropolis with no space for innocent activities. He feels traumatized on seeing ruthless killing of animals and felling of trees which has brought many species of flora and on the verge of destruction. In some of his stories, he makes a dig at the unwise decision of authorities to cut trees and build roads and buildings in those places. Bond's literature off and on highlights the similarity between tree and man. He points out the similarity of development and decay in human beings and trees. Both trees and men grow much at the same pace, if are not hurt or starved or cut down. Both in youth are splendid creatures and in declining years stoop a little. At the end of journey a man like a tree sheds his leaves with a sigh. The *Kitmaker* exclusively presents the similarity between trees and human beings. The old grandfather Mehmood is

compared with a banyan tree and the young grandson Ali with a young mimosa plant. Bond always gets fascinated by the splendor and huge size of banyan. He feels banyan is not only the biggest tree but also the friendliest of all he likes its hospitality. The large innumerable branches of banyan provide shelter to variety of animals: "Apart from boys and girls, it attracts a large number of visitors – birds, squirrels, insects, flying foxes – and many of these interesting creatures actually live in the tree which is full of dark, private corners suitable for variety of tenants"¹⁰. The tree is to Bond like a big family or a boarding house, "in which a number of different families live next door to each other without interfering very much in each other's business"¹¹. The other trees, about which Bond talks affectionately, are oak and deodar. The trees are considered sacred and are worshipped by Indians in different ceremonies and festivals which are a common perform in India. Bond brings forth these aspects as well in his writing.

Bond's Indian susceptibility is discernible in his loving depiction of peepal the most sacred and worshipped tree of India. Bond loves and invokes peepal, not for its association with holiness but for its splendid shape and oxygen giving quality. Trees occupy an important place in his nature writing. He loves to write about the grand banyan, the sacred peepal, the stately deodar, the fragrant pine and the valuable sal. He invokes the grandeur and splendor of trees and also brings awareness towards its various usages. He recounts an entire story about the heavenly association of various trees.

The writer who sought emotional support and security in the cradle of the hilly region, who could feel the kindness of the Himalayan hills and trees of Dehra and Mussoorie, who felt the essential mountain sap and spirit flowing in his blood, and received strength, no wonder of his eyes these hills that is nature itself, is not merely a source of beauty to gaze at, but perhaps, spiritual beauty through which one may clever the old values, honesty, fidelity and love for maintaining everlasting relationship. He finds; observe Meena Khorana:

"endless material for stories in the trees and wild flowers, birds and animals, rocks

and rivers, and simple hillfolk who are an integral part of the mountains.....Bond explores the hills.”¹²

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