

**GREEN VIGNETTES FROM RUSKIN BOND'S 'THE WINDOW'**

Mrs. Jayasree. A  
Asst. Professor (SS), Dept. of English  
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science &  
Higher Education for women, Deemed University  
Coimbatore, India  
*aj\_anand06@yahoo.co.in*

**Abstract**

*"Dawn, daybreak, sunrise. They are all different. Twilight, dusk, nightfall. All quite different... There is no harm in sitting in an office and making money, but sometimes you must look out of the window. And look at the changing light" (75). These lines from Ruskin Bond's Book of Nature surmise what man has to do to develop a renewed and resurgent relationship with nature. Writers have greened literature with a gamut of musings gathered in the company of nature. One can also find threads of green activism woven in their narratives striking the gong for man to wake up and look around at the devastation he has caused to his home, Planet Earth. Ruskin Bond is one such writer who has over the years penned delightful novellas, short stories and poems that have transported the readers to an ethereal land where the simple is significant, where nature is not a mere appendix to life but constitutes life and where human emotions and aspirations are mounted onto the literary canvas in delicate verbal patterns, characterised by Bond's unique observations. 'The Window' published in Bond's collection of stories entitled The Adventures of Rusty, presents vignettes of the dynamic landscapes, covered with a giant confetti of green celebrating nature and life in all its spontaneity and splendour.*

**Keywords** - Ruskin Bond, The Window, ecocriticism, nature, green studies

Cheryl Glotfelty in the Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* quotes Donald Worster, author of *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* thus:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. (xxi)

Ecocriticism not only talks about the application of ecology and ecological principles to the study of literature but also shares the awareness that man has propelled himself into a time and space, wherein he is not only paying the price for his callousness towards Mother Nature, but his actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. The collapse and deterioration of the natural environment is a tragedy in itself. Ecocentrism is a philosophy or perspective that places intrinsic value on all living organisms and their natural environment, regardless of their perceived usefulness or importance to human beings. The writings of Aldo Leopold and his idea of the land ethic and good environmental management are a key element to this philosophy. Leopold in his *Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* views the land as a "fountain of energy"(216) and highlights an ethical obligation that man has to uphold towards it. Land encompasses all the biotic and abiotic forms of life that may or may not have a utilitarian value to man. It is essential that man does not treat land or nature as his property to be dispensed with or disposed off. To stress on the same, Leopold in his introduction to the book observes, "We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in"(xxvi). According to his famous Golden Rule of Ecology, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (xxvi).

Writers have greened literature with a gamut of musings gathered in the company of nature. One can also find threads of green activism woven in their narratives striking the gong for man to wake up and look around at the devastation he has caused to his one and only home, Planet Earth. Ruskin Bond is one such writer who has over the years penned delightful novellas, short stories and poems that have transported the readers to an ethereal land where the simple is significant, where nature is not a mere appendix to life but constitutes life and where human emotions and aspirations are mounted onto the literary canvas in delicate verbal patterns, characterised by Bond's unique observations. His stories bring to light the insensitivity that man has unleashed towards nature and draws the spotlight

on environmental concerns like deforestation, loss of forest covers and extinction of fauna. These stories highlight the interplay between human beings and nature. Spending time in the company of nature offers to the writer wonderful insights on life. His meditative wanderings take on different hues ranging from nostalgia to green activism. During other times, it is the revelry of a writer who has known the trees, the mountains, the gurgling streams and the beautiful flowers to be his choicest companions all his life. He touches upon the multiple facets of nature revealing the significance of their enchanting presence in the grand scheme of things as envisioned by God. A person who immensely enjoys observing animals in their natural habitat, he brings them to life, face to face with the reader in all their majestic glory and is strongly averse to the killing of animals for pleasure. His stories reinforce the fact that animals, birds and insects are significant and deserve dignity as human beings.

Ruskin Bond holds trees in great reverence. Bond has had a strong relationship with the trees throughout his life and he believes they have been witnesses to his losses and laughs alike. In his *Book of Nature*, Bond says, “The tree sums up nature’s perfection which can be seen in every leaf, flower, seed, and creatures great and small” (274). According to him deforestation is murdering the trees in cold blood as he highlights in his book *Rain in the Mountains*:

They cut them down last spring  
with swift efficient tools  
The sap was rising still.  
The trees bled,  
slaughtered,  
To make furniture for fools. (3)

But what enthralls him the most are the mountains. Mountains touch his soul and transport him to ecstasy. His passion for the mountains, he adds, is not like that of the mountaineers who hunger to scale peak after peak or the tourists who visit with an itinerary in hand. Bond feels the timelessness of the mountains render them with a special attractiveness. They make all creation around them feel transient, small and man is humbled in their awe-inspiring majestic presence. In *Rain in the Mountains*, he observes, “Time passes, and yet it doesn’t pass; people come and go, the mountains remain. Mountains are a permanent thing. They are stubborn, they refuse to move. You can blast holes out of them for their mineral wealth; or strip them of their trees and foliage, or dam their streams and divert their currents; or make tunnels and roads and bridges; but no matter how hard they try, humans cannot actually get rid of their mountains. That’s what I like about them; they are here to stay” (197). Mountains fill him with the serenity of submission to the magnificence around. He celebrates life among the mountains in his *Book of Nature* thus, “Dawn, daybreak, sunrise. They are all

different. Twilight, dusk, nightfall. All quite different.... There is no harm in sitting in an office and making money, but sometimes you must look out of the window. And look at the changing light” (75). The window to his small study cum bedroom faces the vast stretch of hills. He observes in *Rain in the Mountains*:

“My bedroom window opened onto the blue skies, mountains striding away into the far distance, winding rivers in the valley below and just to bring me down to earth, the local television tower . . . from my desk I can, at this very moment, see the clouds advancing across the valley, rolling over the hills, ascending the next range. Raindrops patter against the window panes ...and when the showers passes and the clouds open up the heavens are a deeper darker blue. Truly magic casements these ... for every time I see the sky I am aware of the belonging to the universe rather than to just one corner of the earth” (119).

Perhaps this was an inspiration to write ‘The Window’. Published in a collection of stories entitled *The Adventures of Rusty*, ‘The Window’ describes the many splendoured scenic escapades that the writer-narrator is witness to, in the company of his neighbour Koki, a sprightly girl of ten or eleven who comes with her aunt for the summer. Bond begins the story with a description of the room on the roof of a building that was to be his abode for a brief period. The window brought to him, glimpses of nature and the world outside, so much so that he felt, “from the window of my room I owned the world”(70). The banyan tree in the garden below, with its rich variety of inhabitants, the mango tree, the broad path running outside the building and the people who traversed the path everyday, provide a beautiful kaleidoscopic slice of life to the keenly observant writer. “At first, I was lonely in my room. But then I discovered the power of my window”(70). With the little Koki for company, Bond enjoys watching the world through his window with childlike enthusiasm and innocence. Bond knows that children enjoy the company of nature with a lot more ease, enthusiasm and innocence that cannot be matched by adults. They are delighted by the sheer and effortless beauty of the beautiful flowers, derive pure innocent joy from the beauty of the landscapes and are inspired by the myriad forms of nature. They enliven the enticing forms of nature and find infinite pleasure in their company. Bond sees an affinity between children and nature. Both being symbols of innocence, he delights in using the children as his tropes in exploring human perceptions and interactions with nature. Koki discovers the power of the window and instantly becomes friends with the narrator. Both enjoy the scenes of nature and life visible through the window daily. Bond passionately radiates his story with evoking images faithfully recording life around him. Even the tiniest elements are given grand scales

of expression and celebration. The window, the narrator observes, “ gave us the power of detachment: we were deeply interested in the life around us, but we were not involved in it”(72) . “It is like cinema”, said Koki. “The window is the screen, the world is the picture” (72). A failed attempt at making a garden on the roof that is washed off by the rains brings them back to the cherished window. The autumn wind playing with the branches of the banyan tree, the fallen leaves in the wind fluttering around “like butterflies” (73), the clouds changing colours when, “the sun go [es] down in a sea of fluffy clouds” (73), snapshots of birds and animals engaged in their routine and the description of the passing of the seasons give the narrative an idyllic feel. The story begins with spring, revels in summer and as Koki prepares to leave it is autumn. A bougainvillea plant had sent in a shoot through the window and they had decided never to close the window but with Koki’s departure, the narrator closes the window saying, “It would be opened only when the spring and Koki came again” (74).

In Bond’s stories, the creeper at his window, birds on the sill, fragrance of the earth at the first shower, the clouds hanging over the hills, the moon lit night, the stars, all these and many more such picturesque snapshots of nature are a source of infinite joy and perennial inspiration. Nature in its myriad shades and contours enriches his soul providing succour, solace, joy or companionship as the need may be. His approach to nature is holistic in that he recognises the oneness in all forms of life, like parts of an organic whole designed by the divine to live in harmony. Meena Khorana in *The Life and Works of Ruskin Bond* observes, “He finds endless material for stories in the trees and wild towers, birds and animals, rocks and rivers and simple hill folk who are an integral part of the mountains...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”(50). ‘The Window’ thus presents vignettes of the dynamic landscapes, topped with the majestic mountains and sprinkled with giant confetti of green. The narrative resonates the fact that spending time in the company of nature not only awakens one to its magnificence but can also offer lessons on life and living. Celebrating nature in all its spontaneity and splendour without theorising or reasoning instantly becomes a feast for the senses and lends warmth to the soul.

### **Works Cited:**

- Bond. Ruskin. ‘The Window’. *The Adventures of Rusty*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2012. Print.  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Book of Nature*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2016. Print  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Rain in the Mountains: Notes from the Himalayas*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1993.  
Print

- Glotfelty, Cheryll, Harold Fromm. (Eds.) *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press: Georgia, 1996. Print
- Khorana, G, Meena. *The Life and Works of Ruskin Bond*. United States of America: Praeger. 2003. Print
- Theopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*. New York: OUP, 1989. Print
- Worster, Donald. *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination*. New York: OUP, 1993.