

Bond's Bond with Nature

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Abstract

Human beings live in the realm of nature, they are constantly surrounded by it and interact with it. Unfortunately, the present day world is a world of advancement, hi-tech technology and unprecedented scientific growth and development. People live fast life which made them to turn a blind eye on ecological degradation. In such a situation writers have a responsibility to create ecological awareness among the common people. Ruskin Bond is one such writer whose works are woven with splendid Himalayas as a backdrop. His view that humans are inseparable from nature pervades throughout his writings. The statement speaks volumes about his close affinity with nature and the positive effects of environment. This paper brings to the fore the humans relationship with nature which is extensively highlighted in Bond's writings.

Key words: Nature and humans, Bio diversity, Himalayas and beauty, environment

Introduction

A prolific author, a story teller beloved by children and adults alike, Ruskin Bond is one of the greatest writers of fiction from India. He is an Indian author with British descent who is very popular for his versatile writing and elegant style. Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh on 9th May 1934. His father was an Englishman and mother was an Anglo – Indian. He grew up in Jamnagar, Dehradun and Shimla. His career in writing is forty long years and his achievements are many. He has been writing in different genres like novels, short stories, essays, and poetry. He has written more than thirty books for children. Bond has written over 100 short stories and two autobiographies. Bond's first novel is ***The Room on the Roof*** written in the year 1956. It was written by Bond at the age of seventeen. This maiden venture won him John Llewellyn Rhys prize in 1957. Ruskin Bond received Sahitya Academy Award for English Writings in India in 1992 for his novel ***Our Trees Still Grow in***

Dehra(1991). He received Padmabhushan from the Government of India for English literature for children in 1999.

Ruskin Bond shows exceptional talent in writing about nature and children. His enchanting stories are woven with splendid Himalayas as the background against which human activities depict themselves. He writes about ordinary people living in small towns of Himalayas and his stories deal with simple things in life. His description of Indian bazaars of the early post independent period is a mirror reflecting the social setting, culture and traditions of the people of small towns. The child protagonists and other prominent child characters are woven around these settings and locales in a semi – humorous and compassionate manner to form a rich fabric of fascinating stories like the Adventures of Rusty and his friends in the novels *The Room on the Roof*(1956)and *The Young Vagrants*(1981).Bond’s works clearly show his love for animals and nature. Nature has been a great strength and a source of solace and comfort for Bond. He derives inspiration form nature.

Recently, his short story “Susannah’s Seven Husbands” is made into a movie “SaatKhonMaaf”, directed by Vishal Bharadwaj which starred PriyankaChopra.Bond played a cameo in the movie.The other stories which were turned into movie are “Junoon” in 1978 and “The Blue Umbrella” in 2007.

Bond’s Biodiversity

The pre-eminence of nature in human existence cannot be over emphasized. Nature pervades and stalks over every aspect of human life. Nature, rightly finds an important place in literature as human life is intrinsically entwined with it and therefore literature that deals with all aspects of humanity, naturally respects nature in all its glory and moods that coincide with those of human beings. They are presented graphically in all genres of literature by almost every writer since his presentation will be incomplete if nature is not mentioned. Humans feel enchanted in the world of trees and animals. Every human being has a penchant for nature. Human beings find comfort and solace in nature. Nature has been a source of inspiration for many poets, writers, philosophers, artists and many other professionals for ages. Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge are the few poets who have depicted nature as a pure, complete and a perfect creation of God. For some writers like Ruskin bond nature is the soul of their writings. As Ruskin Bond believes that humans identify themselves with nature and are more fascinated when live in close proximity with it

Bond finds a companion in nature. Every drop of rain brings joy for him, chirping of birds is a source of happiness to him. He carefully observes the movements of squirrels which tickles his fancy. He is overjoyed in feeding sparrows. These minute actions of happiness bring much cheer to him. The portrayal of nature in the books of Ruskin Bond is very appealing. There are several books of his which describe flora and fauna. As a child Ruskin Bond developed a strong bond with nature. He was brought up in the towns which are under the foot hills of Himalayas. So the love for nature was instilled in him right from the childhood. As S.Mohanraj says:

...To me it is his simple style of narration with nature as one of his characters almost always. He seems to be obsessed with landscapes, the hilly terrain, water spots, mountain streams, cool lakes and ponds and huge trees in particular rhododendrons, deodars and sals; flowering plants-petunias, nasturtiums and marigolds changing seasons and birds and animals ... [119] Here the writer has used the term 'obsessed' which signifies the extensive influence of nature on Bond. As discussed in the above quotation Bond describes nature extensively in his works. PrabhatK. Singh quotes a statement in *The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond* made by Bond himself which portrays Bond as an ardent lover of nature. "If someone were to ask me to choose between writing an essay on the Tajmahal or on the last rose of summer; I would take the rose –even if it was down to its last petal" [20]

This is something which Bond discovers in nature, he finds enchantment in the tiny things of nature. He chooses to write about the last rose of summer rather than describing the magnificent Tajmahal.

Ruskin Bond lives in Mussorie in Ivy cottage with his large adopted family of sons, grandsons. He made the Himalayas his home, as he never wants to part himself from the serene beauty of mountains. He got many lucrative offers which demanded him to live in cities but no amount of monetary benefits could convince him to withdraw his acquaintance with the charming world of nature. He always hated the cities which are like a concrete jungle. This is clear if we look at these lines from the short story *Most Beautiful*

"I don't quite know why' found that particular town so heartless, perhaps because of its crowded, claustrophobic atmosphere, its congested and insanitary lanes, its weary people...." [67]

Bond is displeased with the chaotic atmosphere of the towns and cities. The crowded streets and congested lanes annoy him which is contrary to the atmosphere of his place where he discovers peace and tranquility in the hills. He is rejoiced to hear the chirping of birds, the fragrance of flowers enthralls him, the sight of dancing plants in breezy air amuses him and he finds solace in the clattering of rain drops. Ruskin Bond is very naturalistic in his approach towards nature. He wants to view nature in its purest form. He wanted everything in his garden to grow naturally. He feels that nature has its way and plan of growing itself. Thus it will have its own raw beauty and no amount of artificiality is acceptable to him. This is quite apparent when we look at this statement from *The Book of Nature*;

But I have always had this dream of possessing a garden of my own. Not a very formal garden. Certainly not the 'Stately home' type, with its pools and fountains and neat hedges as such described in such detail by Bacon in his essay *Of Gardens*. Bacon had a methodical mind, and he wanted a methodical garden. I like a garden to be a little untidy, unplanned, full of surprises rather like my own molded mind, which gives even me a few surprises at time. [32]

Bacon's essay *Of Gardens* is a long, elegant but detailed essay and full of ripe knowledge, about nature and our intimate relationship with it. Bacon provides details about different flowers. His idea of a garden is very neat, planned and accordingly planted but Bond prefers a garden which is not systematic. He likes a garden which is original in its form, not something which is arranged artificially like Bacon's garden where he describes his ideal structure of a garden.

For gardens (speaking of those which are indeed prince like, as we have done of building), the contents ought not well to be under thirty acres of ground; and to be divided into three parts: a green in the entrance, a heath or desert in the going forth, and the main garden in the midst, besides alleys on both sides. And I like well that four acres of ground be assigned to the green, six to the heath, four and four to either side, or twelve to the main garden... [98]

Bond stated that the idea of a garden for Bacon is methodical because he had a methodical mind. But Bond chooses to view the uncontrolled beauty of nature. He finds delight in the wild beauty of nature as he says:

Wild roses give me more pleasure than the sophisticated domestic variety. On a walk in the Himalayan foothills I have encountered a number of these shrubs and climbers (160)

True as the statements made by Bond some wild flowers are more fascinating than the domestic type. Bond uncovers the concealed beauty of the wild flora which is unnoticed by many.

Bond loves nature so much that he can't be divorced from it. He had gone to England in search of identity but his restless mind could find solace only in the well-wooded magnetic fields and exotic valleys of Dehra and Mussoorie. So, he returned to the woods after a sojourn in England. Likewise Bond's characters, though living on the margins of civilized life of modern cities, never feel drawn to the urban amenities and attraction. Kishan Singh, the tunnel watchman in *The Tunnel* says:

"It is safer in the jungle than in the town. No rascals out here. Only last week, when I went into the town, I had my pocket picked; leopards don't pick pockets". (88)

Kishan Singh ensures safety of man in the jungle rather than in the towns and cities. He feels that the creatures living in the towns and cities are more troublesome than the creatures living far away from the vicinity of these civilized places i.e, in forests.

Bond acknowledges the presence of trees with the touch of his hand against their trunks and he has been doing this since his childhood days in Dehra. From the trees which grew in his grandma's garden, he became a lover of the trees and also a part of their existence. He writes frequently about ravines and waterfalls, streams and pools hidden in the jungle. He talks about giant ferns and dahlias and wild begonia, about oaks and maples and deodars. Nature is not merely a decorative background but a power that influences the personality of people. Bond has humanized the world of nature to derive his own joy in the living. Bond's love for the animals, birds and insects that make their living under the fostering care of nature strengthens his ties with nature and his understanding of it. Bond realizes that these animals and insects form Part and parcel of nature and that without his sympathies towards them he cannot come full circle in terms of his rapport with nature. In *Big-cat Tales* Bond depicts a situation where a leopard strayed into a tunnel exactly when a mail train is scheduled to pass through it and here all the sympathies of Bond are with the leopard which can be sensed in the following quote.

‘The train will be coming soon,’ he whispered urgently. ‘We must drive the animal out of the tunnel, or it will be killed.’

The khilasi and I both shouted together. Our voices rang and echoed through the tunnel. And the frightened leopard, uncertain of how many human beings were in there with him, turned swiftly and disappeared into the darkness”.[207]

Here Bond wants to make a point that human beings should co-exist with nature. In *The Young Vagrants* Bond describes an incident where he encounters a tiger which does not harm him because he has no evil intentions. From these incidents it is very clear to envision Bond’s love for animals. Not only the domestic variety but the wild beasts have a soft corner in his heart. He deals with animal subjects in a lighter vein depicting children’s play and their thoughts about animals in his works *Grandfather’s Private Zoo* (1967), *Tigers forever* (1983), *Night of the Leopard* (1979) and many more. These books are suitable for children of six to ten years of the age. The more serious animal subjects regarding concern for the extinction of tiger population are more suitable for older children. For instance the short story *Tiger Tiger Burning Bright* in his book *Time Stops at Shamli and other stories* shows this concern. The title of the story is taken from a poem in William Blake’s *Songs of Experience* which is as follows.

Tiger! Tiger! Burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

The tiger stands for fierceness and wild beauty. It represents more mature, harsher and intense energies of nature. There is beauty in symmetry. Bond uses this beautiful description of the tiger by Blake to fictionalize the character of the tiger to form a thought provoking story of a lone tiger’s battle for survival.

Bond’s love for nature is in tune with Wordsworth. Both of them had their own experiences which constituted the sources of their poetic thoughts, *The Prelude* (1850), was Wordsworth’s expression of his veritable inner feelings. In this book Wordsworth describes how his senses of beauty were molded in the lap of nature during his childhood and boyhood.

Oh! Many a time have I, a five years child,
A naked boy, in one delightful Rill,
A little mill-race severed from his stream'
Made on long bathing of a summer's day,
Bask'd in the sun and ploughed, and bask'd again.[288-292]

In these lines Wordsworth expresses his feelings for nature from childhood to boyhood. Similarly Bond in his various works explores his own relationship with the mountains.

Having lived in the lap of nature all his life, he has a deep and abiding love for nature, particularly the flora and fauna of the majestic Himalayas. He is pained by the environmental degradation of the hills and the melting of the forest cover due to felling of trees. The preservation of all mankind and the world of nature and an awareness of a link between the world of nature and man are always present in the writings of Bond. The illustrations so far bring out clearly Bond's love for nature. He is a person who has been a campaigner for the protection of our forests and animals. Reading Ruskin Bond perhaps has a stronger influence on people than listening to confirmed environmentalists of the present day.

Conclusion:

Nature's harmony encompasses all creatures, great and small, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak and Bond accepts the ultimate truth with humility. He feels the power of sky, the earth and of a small cherry seed alike. His stories breathe a deep love for plants and animals. Bond's call to turn towards the essence of life and recognize to man-nature interdependence is aimed at preserving life, which is beautiful and powerful. He preaches through his works the significance of landscapes and peculiar ethos through carefully mastered words. Ruskin Bond is a true environmentalist who propagated conservation and protection of wild life. In almost all his works nature forms a background. Bond is an ecologist. The concern was genuine, but the world was blind to it. Today we can witness how right Bond was.

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