

“Mountains and Rivers in my Blood”: Environment as the Level of Integration above the Individual in Select Works of RUSKIN BOND

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Abstract:- Ruskin Bond a contemporary writer was born in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh and lived in Delhi, Mussourie and Dehradun and the beauty of these plains had a telling effect on his writings. This writer is a philosopher who observes things that others fail to see or would never even think of seeing. He makes the simple, ordinary objects of nature come alive and dazzlingly bright through very lucid language that comes from genuine passions. He possessed a genuine faith in life and this faith he attained in the lap of nature. In all his works we find nature being prioritised and at times placed above individual psychological workings. Ruskin bond is a versatile genius who writes essays, novellas, poems and a number of novels. He has also written five hundred short stories and articles published in anthologies, in his book, *Rain in the Mountains*, his flirting with nature and words that have the capacity to bring to life nature becomes evident. In his novellas, “The Room on the Roof” (for which he won the John Llewellyn Memorial award), in another novella “The Vagrants in the Valley” and in his short stories we see him prioritizing nature..

Key words: Kasauli, Philosopher, genuine Faith, Nature, lucid language, prioritizing Nature.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mountains and Rivers in my Blood: Environment as the level of Integration in Select Works of Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond shares a deep bond with Nature. Most of us consider the earth to be just an orb of rock with a thin layer of air, water and life covering its surface. The gross neglect of nature and importance given to science and technology pushes us to a condition of ecological challenge and environmental degradation. To overcome the challenges and save humanity from further demolition we have to change our values, consciousness from unethical to ethical. Technological advance is acceptable but with a human face. In this regard Ruskin Bond and other ecological writers like Jim Corbett, Rudyard Kipling, and Sally Carrighar and so on have championed the cause. Bond turned to be successful in determining an intimate relationship with life in its various forms.

What makes Ruskin Bond matchless is not that being an Englishman who made India his loved home not that he fell in love with mountains and rivers but that he cultivated ancient wisdom on the foothills of the Himalayas.

In Bond’s short stories, novellas and novels we notice a striking attachment to the aspects of nature – to birds, birdsongs, bees, rainbows, sky, forests, animals, rocks,

springs etc. And this engaged him much more than his attention to humans and their worldly ways. The harrowing events of his early childhood incited by his mother’s abrogation, marrying another man and father’s death left a lasting blotch on his psyche. This may be one of the reasons why Indian setting and milieu remains so much closer to his heart and India epitomizes the lost world of his golden childhood, of leniency and complete love of sunshine and freedom. In his autobiographical work from *A Writer’s Life*, Bond says-

.... even though my forefathers were British, Britain was not really my place. I did not belong to the bright lights of Piccadilly and Leicester Square or for that matter to the apple orchards of Kent or the strawberry fields of Berkshire. I belonged very firmly to the peepal trees and mango groves; to sleepy little towns all over India, to hot sunshine, muddy canals, the pungent smell of marigolds; the hills of home; spicy odours, wet earth after summer rain, neem pods bursting, laughing brown faces and the intimacy of human contact (154-55).

After almost all Anglo – Indian families returned to U.K., Ruskin Bond and his mother’s family were the ones who settled in the peaceful town of Dehra. Ruskin Bond moved in and around Mussorie and the foothills of the Himalayas and produced all his works that bore the essence of freshness, natural beauty and can be considered excellent works of eco criticism. His ardent love for nature is worth noting.

International Journal of Science, Engineering and Management (IJSEM)
Vol 3, Issue 5, May 2018

...people come and go, the mountains remain. Mountains are permanent things... Humans cannot actually get rid of their mountains. That's what I like about them; they are here to stay... I like to think that I have become a part of this mountain... and able to claim a relationship with the trees, wild flowers – even the rocks that are an integral part of it... Yesterday, at twilight when I passed beneath a canopy of oak leaves, I felt that I was a part of the forest. Ruskin Bond's obsession with natural objects make him poetic and the prose that he writes takes the shape of romance and poetry. A parrot screeched suddenly, flew over my head, a flash of blue and green. It took the course of the path, and I followed its dipping flight. (Rain in the Mountains 97, Ruskin Bond, The Children's Companion, 1.)

There is something deep and ethereal in Bond's association with Nature. The esoteric reality of Bond's fiction is perpetually human relationships, coming closer and seclusion of loneliness of individuals – man and man, man and woman, man and nature which gets focussed most. There is a strange combination of humour and pathos in his stories in a style similar to Charles Lamb. The pathos too like Lamb emerges from the deep – rooted loneliness in his personal life. Bond makes suggestions of such lonely figures in Miss Mackenzie, Suraj, Dukhi and such others. Bond has never been able to reconcile to his mother's remarriage after abandoning his father and the entire family and this has been the principal reason for his remaining single. The fragile qualities of human relationships have resulted in mental trauma and probably this lent logic for his profound love for the mountains that remained fixed and steadfast. The longing for a home with a mother- figure crops up constantly in his stories. The absence of his mother had been the principal reason for his remaining single. The Garhwal Mountains therefore form a backdrop of many of his stories. His intense love for the mountains and streams made him sensitive towards nature and condemn its massive destruction. Ruskin Bond emerges as a visionary much ahead of his times in identifying the need for ecological balance. Obliteration of the flora and fauna leads finally to the death of man. Annihilation of this delicate balance with all its forms of life and as a consequence winter turns warm, monsoon remains bereft of rains and land turns into a wasteland. This sentiment was shared by T.S.Eliot who in the early twentieth century spoke of the depravity of the moral and spiritual values. Bond was inspired to construct new ethological ethics. Man swayed by his greed and materialistic urges felling trees at an enormous speed will result in the world getting transformed into a desert. Bond like T.S.Eliot has rightly grasped the trick to turn the wasteland into a fertile

green land. Bond through his narration conveys the message that there is a mysterious and a deep bond between man and nature and we need to understand it and the Indian tradition is cosmocentric where man lives as a part of an entire system where everything is related to everything else.

Bond's concern for ecological balance compelled him to write on nature and today he is one of the leading ecocritics of the world. Bond as an environmentalist is much concerned about the destruction of the forests and extinction of animal species in the Himalayan regions as a result of which the balance between the animals and the human world is getting disturbed. Man's greed for materialism has led to environmental degradation and man is getting negligent towards nature.

Bond by touching upon the beauties of nature has even oriented his readers and audience to appreciate the smell and little joys of nature that are priceless and cannot be bought or sold with money.

Literature has been a great help in evoking the awareness amongst the humans to save nature and to plant more trees. Now - a- days people have realized the importance of saving nature otherwise people will soon be facing natural disasters. In the year 2014, due to cloud bursting lots of people were killed at Kedarnath and Badrinath.

Bond through a profound understanding of Indian religion, culture, mythologies, and custom has grounded his stories around them and all this has lent a realistic tone to his fiction. For Bond alliance with nature is the pathway for realising Brahma in oneself.

This we know, the earth does not belong to the man. Man belongs to the earth. This we know all things are connected like blood which unites one family... Whatever befalls the sons of the earth, Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web, he does it to himself (Elampirithi 135).

Scientific findings have often been the trigger for environmental treaties. This is true of the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the Ozone Layer; the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCC), CBD, and the ongoing global negotiations to phase out the production and use of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and several other treaties. Bond's anxiety of environmental preservation is portrayed through his writings. In a number of the short stories and novellas, environment forms an integral part of ecocriticism. The term ecocriticism was first coined by William Rueckert in his critical writing, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". The word 'eco' comes from the Greek root word 'oikos' which etymologically means the earth and 'logy' from 'logos' which means logical

International Journal of Science, Engineering and Management (IJSEM)
Vol 3, Issue 5, May 2018

discourse. Together they mean criticism of the house – the environment is represented in literature. Ruskin Bond is opposed to the anthropocentric view which places Man on top. However, ecocriticism decentres humanity's importance to every aspect of nature and environment. Across genres and periods writers have represented the aspect of nature as they face a crisis situation and these ecocritics have played a vital role in building eco – consciousness. Among such eco critical works special mention may be made of Kamala Markandaya's, *Nectar in a Sieve* which represents nature as a destroyer and a preserver of nature. She has shown the evil effects of industrialization as they have also other writers like Thomas Hardy, especially in *The Return of the Native* where the heath comes across as the central protagonist in the Victorian period and also by the renowned writer D.H. Lawrence in the early Modern period. Moreover, this spirit has also been captured well in the prize winning book of R. Llewellyn in *How Green was the Valley*. Ruskin Bond's *No Room for Leopord* presents the pathetic condition of the animals after deforestation. 'The Tree Lover', 'The Cherry Tree', 'All Creatures Great and Small' have drawn our attention to the chain which joins man and nature. This ecological consciousness is present in most of Bond's short stories like 'The Cherry Tree., 'Once Upon a Mountain time', 'Man and Leopard' which study the relationship between literature and environment. The world faces an enormous challenge in the coming century. We are still learning to live as one interdependent world. As yet our leaders have shown little vision and little graciousness to build a caring and a sharing world. But the world's civil society and its public will have the capacity to turn around the politician and the bureaucrat. It is only this idealism and vision that will secure our common fortune. (Green Politics 14). This sentiment finds an echo in Ruskin Bond's works . In one of his novels he writes: Now there is an outcry. It is suddenly fashionable to be an environmentalist...

Perhaps it isn't too late to save the little that is left. They should start by curbing the property developers, who have been spreading their tentacles far and wide.(Ruskin Bond, *The Children's Companion*,2).

Ruskin Bond's natural and dominant theme is ecology and environment. Natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Mussorie always constitute the setting of his works and reflect his undying faith in the healing powers of nature. Through his short stories for children Ruskin Bond presents a very significant message to everyone about the importance of nature. Ruskin Bond has succinctly summed up the concept of the importance of Nature in a few words: "Never mind. Men come and go, the mountains remain."

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