

BOND'S BOND WITH NATURE AND CHILDREN IN HIS SELECTED SHORT STORIES – AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond is fond of Nature and he is interested in exploring the vast, inexhaustible storehouse of Nature. From a close reading of many of his stories, it is evident that he loves two things more than anything else in this world and those two things are Nature and Children. At the same time, he seems to be fond of children and so writes about childhood. Perhaps, it is the simplicity that is associated with both Nature and Childhood that prompts Bond to write about both. He reveals exceptional talent in discussing childhood. His descriptions are simply moving and convincing. 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. 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. In almost all his works nature forms a background. Bond is an ecologist and a true environmentalist who propagated conservation and protection of wildlife. Today we can witness how right bond was.

Keywords: ecological balance, environmentalist, flora and fauna, lap of nature, childhood

Ruskin Bond is a writer of the postindependence era, and like many a writer of that generation, Bond, too, wants to produce literature that will fit into Indian ethos - literature that can be considered to be truly Indian and will cater for the needs of at least one section of Indian society. From a close reading of many of his stories, it is evident that he loves two things more than anything else in this world and those two things are Nature and Children. He has been said, "sees the vision of the paradise in the sunlight and the green of the earth in the beauty of the human face and the wealth of human life, even in objects that are seemingly insignificant" (Prabhat K. Singh, Ed., **The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond** 1995, P1). In other words, it is innocence, the innocence of childhood that he seems to visualize. It is that, perhaps, results in a compulsive urge for him to write about Nature and its denizens in a simple language always conveying the idea of a dire need of close communion between mankind and Nature. Ruskin Bond is aware that man is essentially a product of the environment and as such it is difficult for him to survive without interaction with the environment.

In this way, Bond's writings, especially his short stories, appear to be very relevant at present as the enormous advancement of technology is posing a threat to human life and well-meaning environmentalists are predicting a near total annihilation of the entire globe in the not too distant future. This implies that continual life is possible on earth provided man lives close to Nature and tries to augment her treasures and not exhaust it.

Ruskin Bond is fond of Nature and he is interested in exploring the vast, inexhaustible storehouse of Nature. At the same time, he seems to be fond of children and so writes about childhood. Perhaps, it is the simplicity that is associated with both Nature and Childhood that prompts Bond to write about both. He reveals exceptional talent in discussing childhood. His descriptions are simply moving and convincing. His stories such as *The Tunnel*, *The Fight*, *The*

Visitor, The Great Train Journey, The Eyes of the Eagle, and The Wind on the Haunted Hill demonstrate his exceptional knowledge of children and childhood.

A careful reading of Ruskin Bond's stories gives the impression that his books have been written by a child. That shows Bond's strength. Bond has the rare capacity to peep into the hearts of his characters drawn against the background of Nature. He is excellent while dealing with the psychology of children. It looks as if he lives in their mental atmosphere as he portrays their inner and outer weather clearly. In this respect, he seems to be in the line of writers such as Dickens, Tagore, Chekhov, Berry, Turgenev and Tolstoy. In addition to this, in Ruskin Bond we often come across a dreamy world of the *Panchatantra*.

That children are spontaneously drawn towards Nature is also shown in the following passage: "I think I'll become a teacher. I'll teach children about animals and birds, and trees and flowers" (Bond, *Himalayan Tales*, 2003, 110).

Ruskin Bond writes about human love. According to him, society is in dire need of human love. The word human seems to be treated by Bond as a synonym of natural, simple, and unsophisticated. Bond shows sympathy for the poor children. Children, according to him, are the future of the country. A country which loves children will never fall down. The children as they are depicted by Bond are as the beautiful Garhwal and its blossoming flowers. He goes out of the way to argue in favour of people and children who are victims of injustice and evil.

It is the humanity of children that attracts the attention of Ruskin Bond. When we read his fictional works, we get the impression that he is interested in human beings because he is primarily interested in the destiny of mankind. He writes about relationships, especially of the people who live in the lap of Nature and behave differently from the city dwellers - people who

are free from the city-dwellers' neurasthenic haste, because the city-people are caught up in the nerve-breaking competition of making money in order to become a success in life.

People in whom childhood is active throughout their life are one with all the inhabitants of the world of Nature. They are not afraid of ferocious animals like leopards and other animals, which belong to the feline species. In the story entitled *The Tunnel*, the tunnel is a powerful symbol of life. Kishan Singh and Ranjigo inside the tunnel to feel the life there. They have nothing to fear in the tunnel. They are not, unlike ordinary people, frightened of the leopard. It looks as if the jungle has set them free.

Bond has been living in Mussoorie for more than three decades. He has made the Himalayas an essential part of his life and work. The Himalayas seem to supply abundant material for stories in the trees and wild flowers, birds and animals, rocks and rivers, and simple hill folk who are an integral part of the mountains. Through his poems, essays, fictional works and autobiographical writings, 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.

Bond's stories for young children are generally set in a small, isolated Himalayan town or village which still retains its inherited values of basic honesty, faith and love for the family and neighbours. Parents do not have to worry about the safety of their children at all. Children go around freely without fear of violence or crime because people from the hills are quick to smile, hospitable, and trusting. Against such a benign atmosphere, Bond envisions his own and his protagonists' childhood as a long afternoon of gaiety, play, and carefree abandon. His characters take delight in swimming in the forest pools. They take naps under shady trees with butterflies and beetles humming lazily overhead, climb mango, litchi and guava trees, ride bicycles down

precipitous hills and explore river and mountain paths. The timelessmagical atmosphere of the hill station in summer or during vacation quicklyenvelops his stories.

Panther's Moon and *Tigers Forever* are Bond's strongest pleas for the preservation of wildlife. Both collections illustrate that tigers tum into maneaters only because of human greed and fear, rapid deforestation and upsetting of the ecology, and a violation of the trust placed in humans by Nature. *Tigers Forever* is the story of a majestic old tigerwhich lived peacefully near avillage in the Himalayas, and with the help of a village boy had cleverlymanaged to evade hunters from the city. However, when a forest fire starts in the tall, dry grasses due to the carelessness of some city folk, the tiger's natural habitat is destroyed overnight. The wild deer and pigs he lived on leave the territory and the hungry tiger is eventually forced to attack the villagers' cattle. In a desperate struggle for survival, the villagers ambush and shoot the tiger. Luckily the slightly wounded tiger falls into the Ganges and is carried to theopposite bank where he finds a suitable habitat and a mate.

Bond's poetry is a brilliant record of his concern for the environment. In a sense, he can be called an environmentalist. He wants to protect the environment. No contemporary poet seems to love Nature as Bond does. His ingenuity lies in his use of the simple narrative that unfolds a story with a remarkable sense of immediacy. Writing stories for children, Bond has incorporated into his poetry this story-telling technique.

Bond has humanized the world of Nature to consecrate his joy in the living. His love for the animals and insects that make their living under the fostering care of Nature strengthens his ties with Nature and his understanding of it. He realizes that these animals and insects are 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 the short story entitled *The Kitemaker*, Mehmood the kitemaker speaks of the inseparable relationship that exists between man and Nature: “There is a great affinity between trees and men. We grow at much the same pace, if we are not hurt or starved or cut down. In our youth we are resplendent creatures, and in our declining years we stoop a little, we remember, we stretch our brittle limbs in the sun, and then, with a sigh, we shed our last leaves” (**Collected Fiction, 77**).

Chiefly remembered for his children’s stories, Ruskin Bond may be said to be, as stated earlier, the pioneer of modern children’s literature in English in India. The rise of new children’s literature is partly due to the breakdown of the traditional family set up, when kids often listened to the stories told by their grandparents to amuse as well as to educate them. The rise of media entertainment and telecommunications also has contributed to the popularity of children’s literature. Bond has captivated the minds and hearts of his young readers by the charm and freshness of his narration, which is traditional as well as modern. Based on his vivid memories of childhood in pre independence India, he has adapted his stories to the ancient tradition of fables. The stories of the *Panchatantra* tell tales of animals with human attributes, and are part of a rich legacy of tales. Bond’s children’s stories may be said to resemble fables, though their delineation is modern. His observation of two generations of his adopted family of Prem Singh has helped him in comprehending the spirit of Indian family.

Bond’s other stories which may be called regional stories, also spring up like clusters of cosmos from the Himalayan soil. He is a keen and perceptive observer of children in pastoral, particularly Himalayan India. He knows that children are capable of hard work and that they have an innate spirit of adventure. He is also aware of their closeness to Nature. The children of

Conclusion:

Neighbouring villages and hills, working in the fields or going to school, inspire him to peep into their ordinary shells. Bond's greatness as a writer lies in his having visualized something special or heroic in their day-to-day life. Stories such as *Sita and the River*, *The Blue Umbrella*, *Panther's Moon*, *The Fight*, and *The Thief*, reveal the struggle youngsters have to put up with in order to survive in the world. 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. In almost all his works nature forms a background. Bond is an ecologist and a true environmentalist who propagated conservation and protection of wildlife. Today we can witness how right bond was.

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