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Ecological Perspectives of the Poetry of Ruskin Bond

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Abstract:

Ruskin Bond is one of the best short story writers of our times. He is well-known as a children's writer and a nature worshipper. His works reveal his deep understanding of human nature. The vivid description of flora and fauna, and the whole natural surroundings of Garhwal hills, as depicted in his short stories and novels; mesmerise the readers in all respects. But when we dig deep about his writing and study his works closely; especially his poems, then it comes to our notice that; his descriptions of nature are not only prominent in his prose, but they are more sparkling in his poetry as well. Through his poetry it comes to our notice that he is a most prodigious nature poet. In most of the studies; Bond's contribution as a nature writer has been explored through his short stories and novels, but in the present paper, an endeavour is made to study his love for nature, as promulgated through his poetry. After analysing the poetry of Bond, it is found that he celebrated nature with deep understanding of human relationship with it. The serenity of Nature and the quietude mind of the poet become one in his poems. His affection for trees becomes so sprightlier in his poetry that a reader can easily get immersed with sensuous experience.

Keywords: nature, poetry, sensuous.

Introduction:

The poetry of Ruskin Bond is an offshoot of amalgamation of his consciousness and the consciousness of nature. According to him they are not two things, but one. For describing his oneness with trees, he in his 'Rain in the Mountains' mentioned a quotation from '*Confessions of a Guilty Bystander*' by Thomas Merton. He cited that, "My solitude is not my own, for I see now how much it belongs to them (trees) - and that I have a responsibility for it in their regard, not just

in my own. It is because I am one with them (trees) that I owe it to them to be alone, and when I am alone they are not 'they' but my own self. There are no strangers!"¹

While living in the lap of nature; Bond understood his accountability to sensitise people about worshipping nature. Bond feels he has responsibility in their (Trees/nature) regard and hence he tries to create awareness among the people through his poetry. Becoming one with nature, as a writer he always asks himself, "what would they (trees) like me to do?' And I do what *I* think they would approve of most!"² Ruskin Bond believes that, because of nature he could achieve serenity of mind in the hustle and bustle of life. In the present age, in the polluted environment- both- physically and mentally; it has become difficult to maintain peace of mind.

Technological inventions and innovations brought out everything at the feet of man and as a result Man has indulged in material things in such a way that he forgot about the spiritual aspect of human life. Moreover, it is misunderstood as a superstition. In this regard the observation made by Gordan Haim in "*Dictionary of Existentialism*" is noteworthy. He mentioned that, "Technological advance will move faster and faster. In this crisis we have been unable to confront meditatively what is dawning in this age. With this technological perspective, spiritual goals are no longer meaningful, and MYSTERY has no VALUE. Humans become raw material, merely resources to be used."³

Every individual tries to find something that would preserve their sanity, in Bond's regard 'nature' fulfils that desire, so he writes, "They (Trees) are the guardian of my conscience."⁴ It is because nature follows a system; it has its own mechanism and so Bond loves to follow and live with nature "I live and work under the generous but highly principled supervision of the trees."⁵ We can find this type of thinking and way of life among the different tribal living in India. Therefore, scholars like N.D.R Chandra and Nigamananda Das while studying contemporary poetry in English from Northeast India mentioned that "Tribals of various regions of India know very well that there is only one path to survival and that path is the ecological one, of harmony between man and nature. They believe that all nature is sacrosanct, that the earth itself as a living organism is capable of experiencing pain and pleasure."⁶

Ruskin Bond adopts this type of attitude while writing poetry and so his poetry brings the readers close to nature. The lucidity of expression and lyrical quality of Bond's poetry appeals to

every sensitive reader. Prabhat Kumar Singh in his remarkable critical work *Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond* comments suitably on the worth of Ruskin Bond: "Bond may not give us a Paradise Lost but his lyrical sensibility is definitely capable of prizing the world of Grey's Elogy."⁷ He talks about everything in nature- animate and inanimate things. They may be trees, rocks, mountains, rivers, animals, birds, seasons and everything which is part of nature. In the poem 'Rain' he describes the ecological cycle and regeneration.

After Weeks of heat and dust

How welcome is rain.

It washes the leaves,

Gives new life to grass,

Draws out the scent of the earth.

It rattles on the roof,

Gurgles along the drainpipe

Collects in a puddle in the middle of the lawn-

The birds come to bathe.

When the sun comes out

A lizard crawls up from a crack in the rock.

'Small brown lizard

Basking in the sun

You too have your life to live

Your race to run.'

At night we look through the branches

of the cherry tree.

The sky is rain washed, star bright. (Rain in the mountains 107)

In this poem he talks about the revival cycle of nature. He is a sensuous poet. After the heat and dust of the summer season there comes rain. It washes leaves and gives new life to the grass. It also brings out the scent of the earth. For our sense to hear, the rain rattles on the roof, flows along the drainpipe. The birds also come to bathe. Again, he changes the scene and says: when the sun comes out, a lizard crawls up from a rock. He emphasises that not only all living beings are

interdependent but living and non-living too. "You too have your life to live your race to run." Afterwards he describes the beauty of the night in the following lines; that appeals to the eyes of the reader.

*"At night we look through the branches of the cherry tree.
The sky is rain washed, star bright."*

In the same way in the poem 'Silent Birth' he articulates about the process of rebirth in environment which is silent in nature-

*When the earth gave birth to this tree,
There came no sound:
A green shoot thrust
In silence from the ground.
Our births don't come so quiet-
Most lives run riot-
But the bud opens silently,
And flower gives way to fruit.
So must we search
For the stillness within the tree,
The silence within the root. (221)*

In this poem Bond reiterated the fact that nature never does want to proclaim its importance; it silently does its works. The theme of regeneration in nature is highlighted. The earth gives birth to trees in silence, whereas our births come with some kind of noise. If we do something, which we feel is important, we expect recognition from the world, but nature never requires our appreciation. There is a cycle in nature- from bud to fruit. Bond here proposes the idea of selflessness of nature and asks us to imbibe stillness within us just like the trees. He uses lucid language to explain the importance of nature. We can understand the glory of the environment only when we are able to listen to its music. So, in the poem 'Listen' he asks us to notice different sounds in nature.

Listen to the night wind in the trees,

*Listen to the summer grass singing;
Listen to the time that's tripping by,
And the dawn dew falling.
Listen to the moon as it climbs the sky,
Listen to the pebbles humming
Listen to the mist in the trembling leaves,
And the silence calling. (111)*

The benefit of this expression is to aid in a deeper understanding of human thoughts and ideas. He became so one with nature that he could listen to the beautiful sounds in nature. He listens to the night wind in the trees and the singing of summer grass. He also likes to listen to the moon as it climbs the sky and the pebbles humming. The mist in the trembling leaves also provides him an opportunity to listen to it. He not only listens to himself, but asks us to listen to those beautiful sounds. According to Ruskin Bond these sounds cannot be heard by our physical ear but through the ear of our hearts. He urges us to spare some time and get immersed in the glory of nature. He believes in animism.

His love for trees is stunning. He believes that the trees of Deodars always inspire him to write poetry. So, in one of his poems, he celebrated the importance of Deodar trees. He wrote-

*"Trees of God, we call them;
Planted here when the world was young,
The first trees
Their fingers pointing to the stars,
Older than the cedars of Lebanon." (123)*

When Ruskin Bond sees these trees are being cut down he wrote-

*They cut them down last spring
With swift efficient tools,
The sap was rising still.
The trees bled,
Slaughtered
To make furniture for fools. (124)*

According to The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Forest Resources Assessment estimates, global deforestation averaged over the five-year period from 2015 to 2020 was 10 million hectares per year. In this report it is observed that, "Globally we deforest around ten million hectares of forest every year."⁸ Isn't it quite alarming? Only a poet like Ruskin Bond could envision it and make people aware of it.

After a long time when Ruskin Bond visited Dehra again, he wrote a poem about changing towns in India. He wrote-

*A peepal tree I knew
And flying foxes
In a mango grove
And here and there
A moss-encrusted wall
Old bungalows
Gone to seed
And giving way
To concrete slabs.
A garden town's become a city
And the people faceless
As they pass or rather rush
Hell-bent
From place of work
To crowded tenement
So change must come,
Fields make way for factorie,
The tree succumb
To real-estate
The river plunge
Silt-laden
To our doom....
Too late to do a thing*

*About it now,
For we have grown
Too many,
And the world's no bigger
Than before.
Do-gooders, don't despair!
Nature will repair
Her own, long after
We are dust. (Rain in the mountains 178-179)*

It shows the vision of the writer. He, through this poem, tries to alarm us to save and conserve nature. Otherwise, it will make her balance by herself; at the cost of natural calamity. He held man responsible for bringing imbalance in nature. According to Global Forest Watch (GFW), an online platform to track world forest area, mentioned that, "In 2010, India had 31.3Mha of natural forest, extending over 11% of its land area. In 2020, it lost 132kha of natural forest, equivalent to 67.3Mt of CO₂ of emissions."⁹ It is a real thing to worry about. We are experiencing the drastic effects of deforestation in today's world. Here, in this poem he talks about the past and the present. Old bungalows which were eco-friendly went to seed and there came concrete slabs. He ironically brings out modern human life. An old town which was full of gardens now became a concrete city. He said people becoming faceless means they have lost their identity as a human being. He condemns that human life became meaningless in the name of so called 'change'. In the next lines he describes how the previous scene is being changed. He said due to industrialization the fields have become factories, the trees are cut down to build skyscrapers. Rivers are getting dried up which eventually brings doom. It is a fundamental truth that human civilization initially flourished on the banks of various rivers and that is why he is talking about the doom. He alarmed us to maintain ecological balance. We are developing in each sense ignoring the ecological balance. But in the last lines he reiterated that we must preserve the goddess nature.

Conclusion:

Ruskin Bond's poetry can be seen as a reflection of life, not always beautiful, but effectively realistic and insightful. His views are contradictory to the modern outlook towards natural resources. Modern man only wants to satiate his material needs by exploiting the natural

resources, without preserving it. Due to technological innovations, the work which used to be done by human; now is being done by machines. As a result, the creativity which was there in the work was lost. Moreover, he is going away from nature.

He, through his writing not only talks about animate and inanimate things but also asks us to be mindful in maintaining the harmony between the two. This balance in nature is very much important for the existence of mankind.

It is found that in his poems he talked about the stillness in nature and his mind. He provides the readers an insight to understand the importance of mental peace in contrast with the hustle and bustle of modern life. The philosophical message; as promulgated by our ancient sages; to attain peacefulness in the realms of nature is highlighted through his poetry. He not only talks about tranquillity of mind but also suggests the way that it could be achieved by maintaining harmony with nature. He believed that it is because of the loneliness he had to experience as a child that he could understand the language of nature in a better way. His poetry provides us an opportunity to get immersed with the celestial calmness of nature. After understanding his poems, it can be easily noticed that his poetical talent is equally dazzling. His poetic genius reflects his urge to protect nature. Through his poetry he tries to sensitise modern man to preserve nature.

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