

**RUSKIN BOND AND NATURE: TWO INDISPENSIBLE NOUNS****Mr. Yatharth N. Vaidya (M.A., M.Phil.)***Lecturer in English, Sir B.P.T.I., Bhavnagar.***Abstract**

The present research paper proposes to study the renowned Indian writer, Ruskin Bond, in terms of his dearly love towards nature. No other Indian writer has expressed his/her love for nature/country in a better way than Ruskin Bond. To put it in his own words, the researcher puts the quote of Ruskin Bond as he himself has said, "I am as Indian as the dust of plains or the grass of a mountain meadow." (Bond, VII – IX). The paper also distinguishes Bond's presentation of Nature from other Indian Writers.

The researcher has taken into account select fiction of Ruskin Bond to ponder his love for nature. The researcher proposes to study the social, cultural, economic and geographical image of North India in the novels and short stories of Ruskin Bond. The researcher proposes to examine in what way Ruskin Bond has been able to do justice to the emotional development of his characters in such a setting.

Ruskin Bond's case is not of dual inheritance but of double inheritance. Bond grew up in changing India and his loyalty always remained with and still remains with India. After the Independence most of the Britishers migrated to their native country but very few who were very old to migrate or who did not have financial support, stayed in India.

Though most of English and Anglo Indian families returned to U.K., many of these families chose to remain in India. Ruskin Bond and his mother's family were among such 'whites' settled into peaceful town Dehra. When others were passing through post colonial trauma of displacement, of loss of country, Friends and parents, of insecurity and of finance, Bond, it was only a trauma of a loss of identity. He tried to search his roots in India. (Aggarwal, 66-67)

“I am as Indian as the dust of plains or the grass of a mountain meadow.” (Bond, VII – IX). Nothing can express the love for a country in a better way than these words by Ruskin Bond. We find various images of India by different writers in the realm of Anglo-Indian English literature which present contradictory facets of Indian plethora. Some of them like *V.S. Naipaul*, *R .P Jhabwala*, *Arundhati Roy* and *Mulkraj Anand* have commented on the multiple problems and plights of India, but to judge India based on a single critical angle would be an error of judgment. India is a vast land of multi lingual people who observe different cultural traditions. Moreover, India is a country divided in rural and urban life styles. Any attempt to define India can be incomplete. As *Walt Whitman* wrote in ‘Song of Myself’:

“Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I do contradict,
I am large, I contain multitudes”

Similarly, when we read the portrayal (image) of India, we may observe some contradictions but assimilating contradictions is per se Indianness.

During colonial period many British writers presented India as a land of ‘Sadhus and snake charmers’. *Wilkie Collins* in his *the Moonstone* presented Indians as having clairvoyant abilities even *Rudyard Kipling* also came up with the portrayal of India in his work but India was always looked through the glasses of a colonizer and therefore not very credible. Writers like *Raja Rao* were content with presenting the ‘Vedantic’ India only. Writers like *Khushvant Singh* were busy talking about the preceding and succeeding events of the partition. British writers seldom went beyond their narrow world when they wrote about India. As *M R. Anand* writes, “a few of them shaken hands with the Raja or Nawab. But seldom had they meet the men, women and children in the families and the groups of villages, small towns or walked cities”. (35)

Ruskin Bond’s portrayal of India is incomparable because many writers of Indian origin have also written under the influence of the British ideology but Ruskin Bond accepts India in Toto. As *Usha Bande* writes,

(Bond’s) India lives and breathes in the hills. To him trees, mountains and rivers have a special appeal and have as much beauty and as many problems as humans have. He is not attracted by the glitter of over expanding cities, nor is he unduly moved by the over present social problems. (103-104)

It has been a common practice among Indian English writers that their fiction comes from the urban society. Many writers of Indian English like, *Anita Desai*, *Nayantara Sahgal*, *R. P. Jhabvala* and *Arun Joshi* have mainly described the urban society. But very few writers like Ruskin Bond (Narayan is one such writer) have drawn their inspiration from the rural centers. Ruskin Bond's case is not of dual inheritance but of double inheritance. Bond grew up in changing India and his loyalty always remained with and still remains with India. After the Independence most of the Britishers migrated to their native country but very few who were very old to migrate or who did not have financial support, stayed in India.

Though most of English and Anglo Indian families returned to U.K., many of these families chose to remain in India. Ruskin Bond and his mother's family were among such 'whites' settled into peaceful town Dehra. When others were passing through post colonial trauma of displacement, of loss of country, Friends and parents, of insecurity and of finance, Bond, it was only a trauma of a loss of identity. He tried to search his roots in India. (Aggarwal, 66-67)

For Bond, India has never been just a piece of land. It has meant love, simplicity, unity and acceptance. As Bond has always selected north India as the background for his works, one can very clearly see that north India merges in the end into an Indian spirit. Bond himself considers India as a living organism. He writes, "To love it through the friends, I made and through the mountains, valleys, fields and forests which have made an indelible impressions on my mind. For India is an atmosphere as much as it is a land" (XVI.)

Ruskin Bond also occupies an important place in the history of Indian short story. He is a tireless writer of above 500 short stories. In his stories he has represented particularly north India where he at present lives. Bond has enchanted and thrilled his readers of all ages by providing the setting of the different hilly areas of the mountain "Himalayas" situated mostly in the north India. He portrays the characters of all classes and all ages in his stories. He loves all living creatures on the earth and writes stories even about small insects. Above all, he has immense faith in nature and recommends his readers to trust nature and preserve it to sustain the environment which is under threat of great natural imbalance.

His favourite subjects are pet, animals and a variety of have-nots, including waifs, orphans, abnormal children, restless adolescents,

and frustrated old men, whom he portrays with genuine compassion.... (Naik, 250)

Ruskin Bond is among those writers who would care little for the form and the structure of the story. His stories do not fulfill the requirement of a beginning, a middle and an end as most of his stories are abrupt. Bond lays emphasis on the entertainment as well as the message. He is more concerned with message than genre. He is not moralist like *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, nor is he like *Mulk Raj Anand* who has highlighted the problems of the oppressed and poor people. Some of his stories may fail in the test of its technicality but they never fail in entertaining value and moral lesson. Most of his stories 'instruct as well as delight' us. Bond's short stories can be classified as stories for children, nature stories, ghost stories, crime and suspense stories, railways stories, autobiographical stories and animal stories.

'The Blue Umbrella', by Bond, is set in the back ground of hilly area of the Himalaya mountain range, especially the area known as Garhwal. The story also talks about the difference between people from the plains and hilly people. "Biniya belonged to the mountains, to the part of the Himalayas known as Garhwal. Dark forests and lonely hilltops, held no terror for her. It was only when she was in the market town, jostled by the crowds in the bazaar, that she felt rather nervous and lost."(19)

When Biniya listens to the voices of persons who have arrived for picnic, she approaches them and looking at the torn and dirty clothes, the city people start commenting on the financial position of the hilly people. A woman gets attracted to a leopard's claw hanging from the necklace of Biniya and wants to possess it.

"Buy hers, then. Give her two or three rupees, she is sure to need the money."

The man, looking slightly embarrassed but anxious to please his young wife, produced a two-rupee note and offered it to Biniya, indicating that he wanted the pendant in exchange. Biniya put her hand to necklace, half-afraid that he excited woman would snatch it away from her. Solemnly she shook her head. The man then showed her a five-rupee note, but again Biniya shook her head.

"How silly she is!" exclaimed the young woman. (20-21)

The story does not stop merely by showing the difference between the people of plains and hilly people, but this behavioral difference is also shown among the people of hills. The old Ram Bharosa is a greedy and cunning merchant who wants to possess the blue umbrella of Biniya anyhow. As it happens with all the stories of Bond, the story ends on a note on reconciliation and friendship. Ram Bharosa gives up his greed and Biniya gifts him the blue umbrella. The story, more than anything, tells us about the benign effects of serene atmosphere of hills which transforms average people into loving human beings.

Through the description of Biniya's dress, Bond describes the clothes that poor north Indian hilly people wear:

“Like most mountain girls, Biniya was quite sturdy, fair of skin, with pink cheeks and dark eyes and her black hair tied in a pigtail. She wore pretty glass bangles on her wrists, and a necklace hung a leopard's claw. It was a lucky charm, and Biniya always wore it”
(18-19)

Bond not only loves the trees and the jungles, he seems to extend this love to the wild animals of the forest also. In the story 'A week in the Jungle', he sarcastically comments on habit of human beings to go for hunting and disturbing the wild life.

Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends once took me on a shikar expedition into the Terai jungles in the Siwaliks. The prospect of a week in the jungle, as camp-follower to several adults with guns, filled me with dismay. I knew that long, weary hours would be spent tramping behind these tall, professional—looking huntsmen who spoke in terms of bagging this tiger or that wild elephant, when all they ever got, if they were lucky, was a wild hare or a partridge. Tigers and excitement, it seemed, came only to Jim Corbett. (147)

In 'The Leopard' Bond describes a deep ravine that has become a little heaven of wild life, one of the few natural sanctuaries left near a hill station of north India Mussoorie. Bond expresses his concern about deforestation in the Himalayan hills and the gradual extinction of the leopard in India. As a result, leopards come so close to human habitations.

The leopard, like other members of the family, is nearing extinction in India, and I was surprised to find one so close to Mussoorie. Probably the deforestation that had been taking place

in the surrounding hills had driven the deer into this green valley;
and the leopard, naturally, had followed. (148-149)

Bond also comments on hunters who kill innocent wild animals for their own benefit. They kill leopards for their skins and get enough money. As one of the hunters explains to the narrator, "Leopard skins, they told me, were selling in Delhi at over 1,000 rupees each." (150)

Bond's 'Panther's Moon' is a story about a panther that has become a threat to the people of Manjari and Kemptee villages of Garhwal district in the Himalayan valleys. People of these villages have to remain alert as the man-eater panther may attack any time. Finally, the panther is killed by the village people after killing and wounding many persons. People of the villages take a sigh of relief as they get rid of dangerous man eater panther. Bond also describes the hard life of the people who live in hills. Bishnu has to walk for five miles every day for school as there is no school available in all small villages in hills. Many others like Bishnu's sister Puja can not get education in hills. Bond in the story gives a reference to Indian god Ganesha who has elephant head. In India people worship Lord Ganesha before they begin any kind of work because Ganesha blesses all beginnings. As Bond explains the myth about Ganesha's elephant head as,

When born, he was a beautiful child. Parvati, his mother, was so proud of him that she went about showing him to everyone. Unfortunately she made the mistake of showing the child to that envious planet, Saturn, who promptly burnt off Ganesha's head. Parvati in despair went to Brahma, the Creator, for a new head for her son. He had no head to give her but advised her to search for some man or animal caught in a sinful or wrong act. Parvati wandered about until she came upon an elephant sleeping its head with the wrong way that is to the south. She promptly removed the elephant's head and planted it on Ganesha's shoulders, where it took root. (123)

'A Tiger in the House' is a story of a little tiger, Timothy, is brought home from the forest of Siwalik Hills by the grandfather of the narrator. The tiger cub grows in the company of Toto—the monkey, and puppy a small mongrel, soon shows the nature of a wild tiger. He is transferred to the zoo of Lucknow. Once the grandfather goes to meet Timothy in the cage and talks with it. He learns from one of the keepers that his tiger has died of pneumonia.

His ‘Tiger Tiger Burning Bright’ is also a wonderful story about the only survived old tiger in the forest on the left bank of the Ganga. Bond expresses his concern about the deforestation and the extinction of wild animals. Bond describes how industrialization affects wild life as,

And two years ago, when a large area of the forest was cleared to make the way for a refugee resettlement camp, a herd of elephants – finding their favourite food, the green shoots of bamboo, in short supply—waded across the river. They crashed through the suburbs of Hardwar, knocked down a factory wall, pulled down several tin roofs, held up a train, and left a trail of devastation in their wake until they found a new home in a new forest which was still untouched. (379)

Further Bond also describes how tigers, like elephants, have suffered because of the deforestation and hunters. The gradual extinction of tigers near the bank of the Ganga is mentioned as, “There was a time when the forest on the bank of the Ganga had provided food and shelter for some thirty or forty tigers; but men in search of trophies had shot them all, and now they remained only one tiger in the jungle.” (379)

In ‘Death of a Familiar’ Bond describes the effect of geographical setting on characters. Sunil, the notorious boy does not behave well as long as he is in Shahganj, a small town in the plains of north India. But as soon as he reaches Simla a hill station of north India, to great surprise of the narrator, he starts behaving well. Bond always believes that the atmosphere of hills does affect human beings. He expresses this belief in the story through the narrator as,

I believe that mountains do affect one’s personality, if one can remain among them long enough; and if Sunil had grown up in the hills instead of in a refugee township, I have no doubt he would have been a different person. (67)

The hilly setting not only affects the behavior of human beings, even it affects the behavior of the animal like the monkey. The monkeys of hills are polite and dignified in their behavior towards each other. Bond describes the behavioral difference among monkeys in ‘The Monkeys’ as, “They leapt gracefully from tree to tree, and were very polite and dignified in their behavior towards each other—unlike the bold, rather crude red monkeys of the plains.” (80-81)

Bond's short story 'The woman on the Platform No.8' describes the narrator's stay at the platform of Ambala railway station. He passes time at the platform walking here and there till the train arrives. Bond describes the scene of the platform when the train arrives. The narrator meets an unknown woman who has a pale face and dark eyes and develops friendship with her. She offers the narrator snack. The narrator's friend Satish and her mother arrive at the station. The mother of Satish takes this woman to be the narrator's mother and talks with them. The train is late. The mother of Satish complains about waiting for train till midnight and adds that young boys should not be sent like this as she is afraid of strange and suspicious characters wandering around.

In a nut shell, Ruskin Bond has portrayed the flora and fauna of north India in his short stories and novels. It is beyond doubt that all the works of Ruskin Bond are highly personal. Bond is an Anglo-Indian by birth but a true Indian by heart. It is believed in literature that man, message and milieu have deep relation. Instances of a writer or a poet selecting one particular setting are many in literature. *Thomas Hardy* selected 'Wessex' as the setting for his novels. *Mark Twain* selected areas surrounding 'Mississippi' to be the setting of his novels. *R.K. Narayan* has always preferred to stay in 'Malgudi' and Ruskin Bond has always selected north India to be the setting of his works. Geographical information can better be obtained from travelogues or maps but when a writer prefers to use one setting in his work only, it provides the readers an insight into how people behave in a particular region, and how different cultural rituals are performed in a particular society. The goal of a creative writer is to provide information, knowledge and wisdom through his works. By reading Bond's works, one can gain a fair idea of north Indian society, its food habits, its festivals, its beliefs and the climate, but more than that one can also understand compassion and innocence of the hilly people.

India is crowned with the natural beauty of north India which is made up of states like Jammu and Kashmir, Panjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Hariyana, and Uttarakhand etc. Ruskin Bond's particular liking has always remained with Himachal Pradesh and modern Uttarakhand. Geographical importance of north India is tremendous as it is the launching pad for rivers like the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Satlaj and the Beas, and because of the Himalayan mountain range which protects India from chilly north wind waves and foreign invasion. It is also rich in minerals and natural resources like Gypsum; Lime stone, Rock Salt, Manganese, Bauxite, Coal, Lignite Sapphires, Semi-precious stones and clays. The vegetation in north India is the cheap source of wood and food for the people of India. Mainly, it is divided into

two topographical habitations: (1) hilly and (2) plains. Whereas Jammu, Srinagar, Shimla, Kullu, Manali and Mussoorie make hilly areas, Delhi, Panjab, Hariyana, Uttar Pradesh etc. form habitations on plains. The population is cosmopolitan and multi-cultural. People speak Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Kashmiri, Pahari, Dongari and Ladakhi. People prefer both vegetarian and non vegetarian food with a common liking of an Indian for spicy and sweet items. In terms of sites and buildings it is a mix of urban skyscrapers, heritage buildings and slums. Major portion of the population still lives in villages which are fast swallowed by growing urban population.

Ruskin Bond himself lives in Landour, Mussoorie. It is a small hill station town in Uttarakhand. Bond has a special affinity with the hills.

The sea has been celebrated by many great writers—Conrad, Melville, Stevenson, Masfield—but I can not think of anyone comparable for whom the mountains have been a recurring theme....The Himalayas do not appear to have given rise to any memorable Indian literature at least not in modern times....But to me as a writer, the mountains have been kind.

When you have received love from people, and the freedom that only the mountains can give, then you have come very near the border of heaven. (Bond, 198-99)

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