

Orienting Human Consciousness towards Nature:**A Study of Ruskin Bond's Stories****Dr. Raj Kumar Mishra**

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The present paper seeks to examine eco-ills taking global shape and size due to terrible changes in attitudes of people towards nature. How should human-nature relationship develop and flourish on the face of global eco-crisis, Ruskin Bond's stories can teach humanity world-wide. Unexpected increase in selfishness across the world brought in a new culture of exploitation. In the centre of such ills human beings are largely held responsible. In fact, it has become more or less an attitudinal trouble. In olden days, people were seen dependent and sensitive on/to nature. They bore different attitude towards nature. Unless the attitude of people changes towards nature, no positive change in environmental health can be expected despite several government and non-government initiatives spreading awareness about the idea of co-existence.

Ruskin Bond throughout his writings left no space that did not consider and engage nature. Thinking over probable dangers caused by environmental imbalances has become his passion. He highlighted the ancient sacred bond of human and nature. His stories drawing on Indian myths, folklores, and sacred texts inspire to live in and live by nature. Of course, Indian view of life and environment seems efficacious solution to living global eco-crisis. Hindus worship forests, plants, flowers, herbs, shrubs, cereals, rivers, seas, mountains, animals, stars, planets, air, fire, sky etc. In short, everything is sacred to Hindus so they worship everything that nature gave birth.

Spirituality does not approve categorization of things - seen and unseen- into high and low strata. It subscribes to cosmic interrelatedness of all. It believes in co-existence and mutual respect. Everything is of nature and hence it must not be subjected to imperfect anthropic attitude. Ecology is the branch of biology that deals with the reciprocal relationships between living organisms and their environment. Ecology studies interdependent nature of the whole world. Spirituality and Ecology believe in inter-relationship. Eco-spiritual approach like its parent form is interdisciplinary. Spiritual

patterns and practices differ from nation to nation. Western modernity dissuaded people and prevented them from realizing grace and benevolence of nature. Such people look for having control over nature. Eco-spiritualists hold sacramental view of cosmos.

Eco-literary criticism looks for ways to bring about change in attitudes towards biotic and a-biotic manifestations of God. It evaluates human representations of nature. Human beings have to realize that we are in nature and its protection is our responsibility. As per the Vedic scholarship, God bears mainly eight essential qualities in the forms of Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Sky, Mind, intelligence, and Pride. Such is the nature of God and therefore God is omnipresent. Everything seen moving and unmoving is the part of God. Earth is the only planet where biotic and a-biotic world exist. Human beings are only gifted with thinking faculty and therefore their duty and responsibility gets more important for the safety of biotic and a-biotic world. All the creatures on the earth more or less help in keeping clean their surroundings. In this regard, ruler-ruled relationship must be rejected immediately. All manifestations of biotic and a-biotic environment are intricately related to one another. Their healthy relationship is the immediate need in the face of fast growing urbanization, global networking, and industrialization. Since man is an intermediate player in the drama of material and abstract reality therefore, it is prerequisite to understand the nature of Nature and Man (here ‘n’ and ‘m’ are intentionally capitalized). Eco-critics never visualize men in conflict with nature. All forms of ecological imbalances are anthropogenic and hence they must be got over immediately. An ethically unsound hand disturbs every unit of nature in the form of abuses. As Donald Worster explains:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. (Glotfelty xxi)

Glen A. Love in his essay ‘Revaluing Nature’ published in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm observes, “The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world.” (Love 237)

Ruskin Bond's fortunate bond with nature helped him understand its essential value. According to him, 'trees are guardians of his conscience' and they 'stand and watch over his day-to-day life'. (Book of Nature 121) Nature, in the form of hills, mountains, streams, rivers, trees, birds and animals is very close to Bond's heart, and he passionately relates himself to them. His stories inspire love for the environment, and concern for its safety in the reader.

Bond writes in a prefatory note about his relation with nature: "Living in the hills, or near the great forests, or near the sea, does, of course, makes it easier to engage with the natural world.... When we walk close to nature, we come to a better understanding of life; for it is from the natural world that we first emerge and to which we still belong." (Book of Nature 60) Of course, he made nature his life line and religion. The beauty of nature, education of nature, and delight of nature is impeccable and will remain so forever. Whoever believes in her vital schemes, cannot feel interested in the anthropic systems of greed, pride, and self-indulgence. The anthropic idea of beauty, teaching, and pleasure appear, if closely examined, mere distortions of heavenly schemes of nature. To Bond, "nature is a reward in itself. It is there, to be appreciated, to be understood, to be lived and loved. And in its way it gives us everything- the bounty and the goodness of the earth, the sea, the sky. Food, water, the air we breathe. All the things we take for granted. And sometimes, when we take it too much for granted, or misuse its generosity, it turns against us and unleashes forces that overwhelm us- earthquake, tidal wave, typhoon, flood, drought. But then, Nature settles down again and resumes its generous ways." (Book of Nature ix) To bring about substantial change in attitudes of people worldwide, Bond's stories might be milestone in an era of eco-crises.

In "The Kite Maker" the story writer sheds light on poor relations of people in the society. In it Mahmood, a very popular and old kite maker reflects on differences between then and now. In olden days people were more social and loving towards all sections of society but today they are seen always busy earning their livelihood. Bond sagaciously identifies Mahmood with an old and abandoned banyan tree: "Both were taken for granted as permanent fixtures that were of no concern to the mass of humanity that surrounded them. No longer did people gather under the banyan tree to discuss their

problems and their plans; only in the summer months did someone seek shelter under it from the fierce sun”. He further argues: “There is a great affinity between trees and men. They grow at much the same pace, if they are not hurt, or starved, or cut down. In their youth they are resplendent creatures and in their declining years they stoop a little. They remember, they stretch their brittle limbs in the sun and, with a sigh, shed their last leaves”. He finds trees with human character. “Trees, like humans, change with their environment.” (*My Tall Green Friends*) This story promotes and nourishes the idea of coexistence, that is, we must learn to live with nature amicably.

In “Mother Hill” Bond finds mountains, forests, and flowers kind and feels himself as a part of them. The writer praises and loves the tenacity of mountains. He writes: “I like to think that I have become a part of these mountains, this particular range, and that by living here for so long, I am able to claim a relationship with the trees, wild flowers, and even the rocks that are an integral part of it”. Bond’s parents and grandparents believe: “A blessing lies on the house where falls the shadow of a tree.” (*When You Can’t Climb Trees Any More*) In fact unjust progressive steps led to the emergence of the problem of deforestation and disappearance of green places and hills.

In “No Room for a Leopard” the writer discusses the problem of deforestation and poaching of animals like deer and leopard. The deforestation overturned the coexistence of animals and humans badly turning the beauty of forest into complete desolation. Bond writes: “The leopard, like other members of the cat 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 surrounding hills had driven the deer into this green valley and the leopard naturally had followed”. The poachers nonchalantly kill animals like deer, leopard, and tiger and sell off their skins in the markets of Delhi. In this way, the law of right to live is violated. These poachers do not believe in the idea of coexistence. In “All Creatures Great and Small” he tells us about his upbringing: “Instead of having brothers and sisters to grow up with in India, I had as my companions an odd assortment of pets, which included a monkey, a tortoise, a python and a Great Indian Hornbill. The person responsible for all this wildlife in the home was my grandfather”. The grandfather of the author like modern environmentalist argues for coexistence: ‘It is also important that we

respect them,' said Grandfather. 'We must acknowledge their rights. Everywhere, birds and animals are finding it more difficult to survive, because we are trying to destroy both them and their forests'.

In the story, "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright" Bond takes the reader to the villages of bamboo cutters and farmers located on the left bank of Ganga and surrounded by a huge expanse of forest trees. "Hunters, however, have found the area an ideal hunting ground during the last seventy years, and as a result the animals are not as numerous as they used to be. The trees, too, have been disappearing slowly; and, as the forest recedes, the animals lose their food and shelter and move on further into the foothills. Slowly, they are being denied the right to live". The ever increasing population on hills did not even leave the sacred trees like mango, peepal, babool, banyan, paakar etc.

Since his childhood days, the storywriter has seen his parents especially his grandfather planting and caring trees and having kind attitudes towards animals. To him, "The prospect of a world without trees became a sort of nightmare for me (and one reason why I shall never want to live on a treeless moon), and I assisted my father in his tree planting with great enthusiasm." (*My Father's Trees in Dehra*) Of course the world without trees will turn into desert within no time.

In "Death of The Trees" the storywriter draws readers attention towards the unmindful felling of thousands of trees especially maple, walnut, oak, and deodar. These trees were cut down for road construction. And moreover, "The explosions that continually shatter the silence of the mountains—as thousand-year-old rocks are dynamited— have frightened away all but the most intrepid of birds and animals. Even the bold langoors haven't shown their faces for over a fortnight". The writer had long ago drawn attention to these destructive activities which are now-a-days punishing back. The nomadic community and new arrivals in search of food and shelter to the hills unmindfully set a certain block of forest to the fire causing "Thousands of Himalayan trees were perishing in the flames. Oaks, deodars, maples, pines; trees that had taken hundreds of years to grow. And now a fire started carelessly by some campers had been

carried up the mountain with the help of the dry grass and strong breeze. There was no one to put it out. It would take days to die down by itself.” (Dust on Mountain)

Ruskin Bond in his short stories tries every possible way to sensitize people towards trees. To Indians religion bears highest importance so he took the recourse of *Hindu Puranas* to orient people towards the value of trees. The banyan is one of the sacred trees of Hindus. It is ‘probably the biggest and friendliest of all trees’. It provides shelter to many insects, birds, squirrels, and flying foxes. The banyan tree or the Akshaya Vat has been subject of many Hindu legends and it still attracts millions of pilgrimages to Sangam Prayag (Allahabad). “A group of three sacred trees known as tentar, ‘triad’- a banyan, a peepal, and a paakar planted together- is especially sacred, and is known as Harsankari, ‘the chair of Hari(Shiva)’.” (Book of Nature 132) He further argues: “No other tree provides so much cool, refreshing shade on a hot summer’s day, and for this reason, if for no other, this noble tree deserves our love and care.” (Book of Nature 133)

The peepal tree that the author calls ‘the tree of wisdom’ is fit to sit under its shade on hot days. “Its heart-shaped leaves, sensitive to slightest breeze, would flip gently when clouds stood still and not another tree witnessed the least movement in the air.” (Book of Nature 122) As per Hindus belief, ‘the roots of peepal represent Brahma, its bark Vishnu, and its branches Shiva. As the wide spreading peepal tree is contained in a small seed so the universe is contained in Brahma (the Vishnupurana).’ (Book of Nature 133-134) It is widely worshipped by women in India. In India to cut peepal tree is deemed as a great sin and to plant it is to earn blessings of coming generations. Trees are worshipped across the country with different purpose and pattern. To Indians, all trees are sacred but increasing self-centeredness and selfishness is wreaking havoc on forests, mountains, rivers etc.

To the conclusion, it can be said that Ruskin Bond tried best in his own way to make it out that in the safety of nature there lays the safety of us. Giving respect to nature is to save ourselves. To catch the attention of his readers right away, Bond took the recourse of Indian religious texts and drew vivid pictures of ancient life patterns and attitudes. He himself was the part of eco-awareness programme. His stories are

testimonials to concrete reality. These stories should not be deemed to have been written in sheer abstractions.

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