

Humanism in the Ecological Studies of Ruskin Bond

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Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually as well as collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence (rationalism and empiricism) over the acceptance of dogma or superstition. The term Humanism was coined by theologian Friedrich Niethammer at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moreover humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress.

RUSKIN BOND has been writing for over sixty years about human & his acts, and now has over 120 titles in print – novels, collection of short stories, poetry, essays, anthologies and books for children. In his every work there is a human appeal with pathos regarding the disastrous cutting of trees and slaughtering of innocent animals. His first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, received the prestigious *John Llewellyn Rhys Award* in 1957. He has also attained the *Padma Shri* (1999), the *Padma Bhushan* (2014) & two awards from *Sahitya Akademi* – one for his short stories and another for his writings for children. In 2012, the Delhi Government gave him its *Lifetime Achievement Award*.

He was born on 19TH May; 1934 in the natural surroundings of Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh. But he was brought up in Jamnagar, Shimla, New Delhi, Dehradun and Mussoorie. Apart from three years in United Kingdom, he has spent all his life on Indian soil and now dwells in the queen of hills – Mussoorie with his adopted family.

In his short story, *The Last Tonga Ride*, he beautifully writes about the banyan tree which grew behind his house. Its spreading branches, which hung on the ground & took the root again, formed a number of twisting passageways in which he loved to wander. He told that the tree was older than his grandparents, as old as Dehradun. He has laid emphasis here that trees give their everything to the human beings but in return what they get from the – humans cutting, killing and slaughtering from their roots.

Ruskin depicts the problems between humans and non – human. He writes in his another short story named – *Angry*

River which exhibits humans about the right outlook towards animals –

“She moved about in the pouring rain, chasing the hens into a shelter behind the hut. A harmless brown snake, flood out of its hole, was moving across the open ground. Sita picked up the stick, scooped the snake up and dropped it between the clusters of rocks. She had no quarrel with snakes” (*Angry River* p.no. 70).

In his another short story – *All Creatures Great and Small*, Ruskin Bond wrote about his grandfather’s love for the innocent animals. He presents the beautiful and touching description of the affinity between his grandpa and animals –

“Grandfather had once bought a number of frogs into the house. He had put them in a glass jar, left them on a window sill, and then forgotten all about them. At about four o’clock in the morning the entire household was awakened by a loud & fearful noise, grandmother and several nervous kith and kins gathered in their night clothes on the verandah” (*All Creatures Great and Small*).

In his another notable short story – *The Leopard*, he has depicted about the brutal killing of this innocent animal. There was a party of hunter resting beneath the oak trees. They asked me if I had seen a leopard but the answer was in negative as Ruskin loves the natural objects and animals beyond the proper limit.

Thus Nature has played a vital role in shaping Ruskin- the man and the artist. The snowy covered mountains, the hills, the rivers, the buds, the flowers and the trees have all gone into shaping and craving his personality. They all figure in his major stories quiet often and bind them together in a pattern. Nature, therefore, plays the significant role in the stories of stopping the relentless cutting of trees, which disturbs the balance of ecology. Man in his ruthless urban advance has destroyed nature’s harmony, which has produced havoc and natural calamity. Ruskin Bond’s affinity with flora and fauna has come down to him from his grandfather and father so much so that prospect of a world without trees are a

nightmare to him. Thereby Nature acts as an emotional and heart – touching counterpart for both souls of the flora – fauna and Ruskin Bond is especially attracted and fascinated by natural colours of different surroundings of Nature either – forest, trees, grass, sky and mountain. He writes in *Look for the colours of Life* –

“Colours are everywhere,
Bright blue the sky.
Dark green the forest
And light the fresh grass;
Bright yellow the lights.
Only wind has no colour.”

In his another eminent short story – *The Kite Maker*, he describes the great affinity between men and trees –

“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 both look the resplendent creatures but in their old age, they stoop a little, they remember, they stretch their brittle limbs in the sun, and then, with a sigh, they shed their last leaves” (The Kite Maker p.no.122).

In the story *The Last Time I Saw Delhi*, he mourns on seeing the pitiable condition of flora and fauna in Delhi which is the capital of India. He pens down that thirty years back in Delhi, fields extended on either side of that road as far as the eyes could see. The Ridge, an outcrop of the Aravallis, was scrub jungle, in which the black buck roamed. Feroz Shah’s fourteenth century hunting lodge stood there in splendid isolation. It is still there, hidden by petrol pumps and lost in the sounds of buses, cars, trucks and scooter rickshaws. The peacock has fled the forest, the black buck is extinct. Only the jackal remains. When a thousand years from now, the last human has left this contaminated planet for some other star, the jackal and the crow will remain, to survive for years on all the refuge we leave behind.

His characters are taken from the strata of laymen who live in the close and meticulous association with nature. They are – Nawab, Kite Maker Mahmood, Tonga driver, Toto the monkey, farmers, chawkidars, shopkeepers, teacher, gardener, grandfather and grandmother. To name a few among them, there is *Binya* who holds her *Blue Umbrella*. She is sketched by the writer running after a cow – *Neelu*. There is also his grandparents in his major short stories who made up his mind towards the natural aspects of nature.

There is *Duchy* weeding and pruning in the garden. *Bishnu* who confronts with the terrible and dangerous animal – *Panther* in his village *Manjra*. There is Nawab who patronized even the small kite maker – *Mahmood* who used to make the kites for the laymen. Once Mahmood made the special kite

and named it – *Dragon Kite* which he presented – Nawab who flew it from the vast maidan.

There is Kishen who drives out the wild animals from the tunnel. *Somi’s mother* who nurtures her small garden of sweet peas and roses, are some of his favourite and loveable characters. Mostly they are born and brought up in the surroundings of the hills and all have the fellow feelings for insects, animals, flowers and trees around them.

Ruskin Bond has not stopped yet he has also mentioned about Nature’s dark side which is the consequences of inhuman acts by men. He writes in his short stories that natural calamities like – famine, floods, draught, scorching heat and storm are the result of deforestation erected by men. In *My Father’s Tree in Dehra*, Ruskin Bond has very simply and plainly sketched beautiful scenery of the fruit plants which were planted by his father – “Most of the fruit trees round the house were planted by my father, but he was not contented with planting trees in the garden only. On rainy days, we would walk beyond the river bed, armed with cuttings and saplings, and then we would amble through jungle, planting flowering shrubs between the Sal and the Shisham tree” (My Father’s Tree in Dehra). In the same story he provides a didactic message to those who are in the habit of cutting down the trees to build and construct vast and huge buildings and erect new paths. Here he lays the importance of flora and fauna. Therefore he pens down that if people keep cutting trees, instead of planting them, there’ll soon be no forest left at all, and the world will be just one vast desert.

In *Tiger Tiger Burning Bright*, Ruskin expresses his deep regret for the loss of lush greenery and forest that is really par excellent for its simplicity. So he writes here that on the left bank of Ganga River, where it emerges from the Himalaya foothills, there is a long stretch of dense forest. These are villages on the fringe of the forest, inhabited by bamboo – cutters and farmers, but there are few signs of the commerce or pilgrimage. Hunters, however, have found the area an ideal hunting ground. As a result the animals are not as numerous as they used to be. The trees too have been disappearing gradually, and as the forest, recedes, the animals lose their food and shelter & move on further into the foothills. By and by, they are being denied the right to live in their natural habitat.

This is why we ought to discern the precious value of flora and fauna as they are compliment and supplement to each other. They cannot be separated from each other. A kind of symbiosis relationship has been established between them. Nature has made a wonderful and amazing balance between flora and fauna. If we try to disturb its natural harmony, havoc, floods, earthquakes, landslides, draughts, famines will be emerged out as the consequence of it. He does not subscribe to the blind deification or venerate of nature. He considers flora and fauna as an integral part of this universe. Nature’s bounties make him realize her latent benevolence. He is not forgetful to the realities of autumn, spring, rainy,

summer and winter seasons. Life is another name of struggle and he staunchly relies on the ultimate victory of man. He coins the image of a walnut tree: "The walnut tree is the first to lose its leaves. But at the same tree the fruit ripens, the skin splits; the hard shell of the nut stands revealed" (It isn't Time that is Passing, Writer's Workshop, 9). It is the benevolent force of nature that pervades. Negative phase of nature is evanescent and transient. Autumn has followed by spring and draught by rain. For him, a flower is as good as a prayer, and he also knows that flowers grow between the graves too; this little stoicism imparts a realistic touch of his vision without which his spiteful flight in the bright realm of nature may prove only idyllic. He further adds here that the beautiful description of the forest is marked with an elegiac note as he is passionately committed to the woods of the ecological world of nature and the pain as well as the agony of his heart at the falling of trees give a sensitive & heart rending reflection in the story – *A Long Dry Summer*, he expresses the significance of weather in the following lines –

"Winter came and went, without as much as a drizzle. The hillside was brown all summer and the fields were bare. The old plough that was dragged over the hard ground by Bisnu's lean oxen made any impression. Still, Bisnu kept his seeds ready for sowing. A good monsoon, and there would be plenty of maize and rice to see the family through next winter" (*A Long Dry Summer*, short story of Dust on the Mountain, p.no. 01).

His love for flora and fauna is unique, unparalleled and matchless. He likes to think that he has become an inseparable part of these mountains especially the Himalaya, and by living here for long, he is able to claim a positive relationship with trees, wild flowers, rivers, the rocks and animals.

His adherence to the world of flora and fauna and of hills, insects and the animals is the results of his commitment to the place he was born. The woods, the hills, the flocks of birds, insects, and the trees –all draw his attention with such impassioned intensity that at once he feels an inner urge to lose his own identity in them. Therefore he develops logic, an argument to clutch and to cling to and befriend with nature. His sensitive awareness of nature as an inseparable part of the human world makes him acknowledge nature as human and humane. His short stories the humanizing traits of nature which strengthened the bond between human world and world of nature.

It is next to impossible to go through the short stories of Ruskin Bond and not to be affected by his indelible love for nature, which extends to plants, animals and natural setting around, in the environment and it surely provides the didactic message to the society that human beings must love nature and all the creatures in it, as man is just one species on the earth which has to live in ideal bonding as well as balanced relationship with other species around. This love for flora and fauna was inculcated in his heart and soul by his father, who was extremely fond of natural objects and raised plants of

various kinds and planted trees, hence initiated Ruskin Bond into nature. As he expresses it –

"But the trees seem to know me. They whisper among themselves and beckon me nearer" (*Bonding with Bond* p.no. 119-120).

Nature constitutes for him a mighty symbol of power, fecundity, biodiversity, streams and islands in the hilly areas of Garhwal region. He takes ecstasy in the gleams of sunshine; spends hours and hours on observing the high mountains; roams with clouds; follows the brooks and streams like a child, intoxicated with the sweet fragrance of the flowers on the way. His all five senses become alive in the melodious company of natural objects. Therefore he has a profound love of sensuous beauty. His visual, aural, tactile, olfactory and gustatory senses come into enchanted existence whenever he is in close proximity with the natural objects of flora and fauna. This he constantly witnesses the good and beautiful in all that he sees and in all that surrounds him. He feels excessively delighted at the mere invitation of nature and passes extremely amazing time with it. His lasting affection for the high mountains, sky, clouds, rain, rivers, rivulets, lakes and canals etc., is respectively, depicted at great length and intuitive comprehension.

Having arrived in the queen of hills i.e., Mussoorie, he became a lunatic of mountains, experienced deep kinship and serenity, in the midst of mountains. In order to celebrate the majesty of the Himalayas, he visited Garhwal hills, and he wrote the book *Ganga Descends* in which he describes remote places, which are not even on tourist maps, and only a true lover of nature or the ardent devotee of Himalayas can muster a courage to visit there. In this book of short stories he talks of the Ganga and its majestic beauty as he pens the river "bursts from its icy womb", (p. no. 64), the mountain rivers, the flower valley, and other animals and also the chirping of birds. He further tells that rivers, rocks, trees, plants, animals and different types of birds, all play their significant role, both in Hindu mythology and in everyday worship. This awesome harmony is the most oxidant in these remote areas, where God and mountains co- exist.

He is sensuous up to this great extent that he hears the murmuring sounds of the brook at the bottom of the hill. This sound is an integral part of him and he has grown so used to the constant music of water that when he leaves it behind observes himself naked and all alone. Thereby, a mountain stream becomes an inseparable part of him. To express his unique bonding with nature, he quotes Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* who said-

"Once the mountains are in your blood, there is no escape. Who goes to the Hills, goes to his mother" (*The Man Who Was Kipling*, p.no.54).

To Ruskin Bond, dwelling in the hills is like living in the bosom of a strong, sometimes proud, but always confronting mother. And every time he misses motherly affection in toto

and he spontaneously associates himself with nature. It helps him to get over his loneliness, bewilderment, dejection, anger, etc., which can infect a child who is emotionally abandoned by his mother. Therefore, the 'mother-mountain' becomes the psychic locale of the writer. He is also extremely charmed with flora and fauna of the mountains and the liberty which he believes only the mountains can provide and he never wants to leave the borders of 'heaven' – the mountains.

It is the mind of Ruskin Bond that is even enchanted the earthly sound of frogs croaking in the rain water. After the shower of rain, the air murmurs and tinkles with voices of crickets and grasshoppers and little frogs. And there is one mesmerizes him with its sweet repeated trill but he finds himself unable to trace its source. Later on he depicts the spring rain in his stories in glowing manner. The leaves are presented as fresh and pale green after the rain on the mountains. He writes that rain brings new life and zest and zeal to everything that subsists on the hills. In *Book of Nature*, he talks about the rain, the cloud and the hail together as an appropriate setting for his creative activity-

“The blackest cloud I’ve ever squatted over Mussoorie, and then it hailed marbles for half an hour. Nothing like a hailstorm to clear the sky. Even as I write, I see a rainbow forming” (Book of Nature p.no.186).

He points out that in India there is an ideal example of unity in diversity. India is a land of different cultures, races, castes, creeds, religions, languages, and life – styles which are blended in perfect harmony with its natural landscape, climate, soils as well as flora and fauna. He has meticulously witnessed the importance of Indian flora and fauna; that they are excessively used in manufacturing the various kinds of medicines and herbs which are being prescribed in different kinds of severe diseases. Hence he does not want to live in the hectic and contaminated life of city. He loves to dwell in the natural flora and fauna of Indian soil till his eleventh hour. He is extremely enchanted towards the natural objects of nature.

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