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A Multidisciplinary Research Journal
[A Publication of Devanga Arts College (Autonomous)]

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Single Copy Rs.200

(Remittances by Bank Drafts or Postal Order or Money Orders only - Payable to: The Publisher, Devanga Arts College Manas, Devanga Arts College (Autonomous), Aruppukottai. (Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu.)

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The articles should be in the following mode:

**Font** : Times New Roman

**Font Size** : 11 point

**Printed at** : SIBHU PRINTS, 4/725, Russian Colony, SIVAKASI - 626 189

Ph. No : 0452 - 272741
Ruskin Bond’s Treatment of Nature in selected short stories

Mrs. S. Sharmelee,

Lecturer in English, V. V. Vanniaperumal College for Women, Virudhunagar.

Literature, in any form is a journey through life and the discovery of human kind’s relationship with themselves, with others and with nature. Ruskin Bond is the recipient of John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial prize, the Sahitya Academy Award and Padma Shri in 1999. He is a dexterous artist and has brought forth many excellent short stories. He is one of the leading contemporary short story writers in India. Nature bound with mysteries and beauty has been a perennial source of inspiration for all writers in different languages. Bond also has a deep and abiding love for nature, particularly the flora and fauna of the majestic Himalayas.

Nature has played a significant role in shaping Ruskin Bond as a man and an artist. The hills and the rivers, the flowers and the trees shape his personality. They figure very often in his stories and bind them together in a pattern. He feels in tune with nature particularly in the mountains. Deepa Vanjani in her article “Treatment of Nature in Ruskin Bond” says about what he feels in the mountains, “you do get a mystical feeling, there’s the elevation, the austerity”. (142) Mainly his stories have autobiographical elements on children and mostly on nature. His stories are marked by innocence and optimism. In his short story collection Strange Men Strange Places the stories like “Kipling’s Simla” and “The Story of a Hill Station” reveal Bond’s affinity for nature. In “Kipling Simla “, he describes the journey to the hill station in a romantic way. He recollects and shares his own experiences on the way to Simla through a little used route. Bond prefers only the train journey though the journey by road is much quicker. He describes,

“By bus it is a tedious ten hour journey, but by car it is a picturesque ride, and there is very little traffic to contend with .... But those train journeys stand out in the memory”. (85)

Bond gets delight in running with the winds, smiling with the flowers and conversing with the trees. Simla holds a prominent place in the hearts and the soul of Bond, because he had spent
his happiest childhood days there. The sweet memories of Simla remain evergreen in the mind of Bond. He expresses his immense love for the hills explicitly where he had spent his vacation together with his lovable father. His father planted in him the seeds of inspiration and his love for the nature especially for hills. He went to the hills again and again where he felt comfort and attained peace. Bond recollects his childhood in “Kipling Simla”.

We stayed on Elysium Hills; took long walks to Kasumpti and around Jakko Hills, sipped milk shakes at Davico’s; saw plays at the gaiety theatre (happily still in existence); fed the monkeys at the temple of Takko, picnicked in Chota Simla (87).

Nature becomes a dominant feature in the stories of Bond. Although nature is a recurring and pre-dominant feature in most of Bond’s stories, a few among them stand a part by this exception dealing with the subject. His work Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra is one such short story collection which brought him fame all over and got him the Sahitya Academic Award. He makes a reference to his favourite writer, Kipling’s admiration for the nature in his story “Kipling’s Simla”. Kipling admires Himalayas as, “A Fairland a most beautiful land is this of the five rivers is fairer than all” (86). Further he quotes yet another line from Kipling’s Kim, “who goes to the Himalayas goes to his mother”. (76).

Like Kipling, Bond also comes closer to nature involved in and inspired by the world of nature his writings mainly deal with nature. In his early sixties he came to live on hills and the mountains which inspired him very much. Nature had become a sort of religion and to him the natural world seems to be superior to anything in his life. Living in the midst of nature he has evolved a strange and inseparable both with its elements. Bond’s love towards nature goes hand in hand with Wordsworth’s attitude towards nature. Both sought in natural objects the indwelling spirit of god. Their love has, a mystic touch. They believed that nature could give a person health, beauty and grace.
Being a humanist, Bond considers life in all its forms and has a humane feeling towards
nature. His trees whisper and outstretched their arms to him. His mountains beckon him to come
nearer. The sense of wonder and awe at the objects of the nature is common in Bond’s story. The
wild exuberance of natural objects like trees, mountains, rocks, stones, rivers, and seas inhabit
his stories. This brings a sense of a more close and intimate relationship between man and nature.
Vanjani writes of Bond as:

Bond’s writing makes us creep out of our closed and cloistered homes into
the morning and the evening and seas what majestic beauties daily wrap us
in their bosom. These enchantments persuade us to quit our lives of petty
things and live with them (146).

Bond not only expresses his love for nature but also has a lot of consideration for the
labourers of the remote corners of the earth. In his “Kipling’s Simla”, he makes a reference to the
difficulties and dangerous life led by the Khilasi or station watchman. His duty was to check
whether the tunnel in the forest was clear for the mail train to pass through it without any
obstruction. The life of the Khilasi seems to be very adventurous for Bond but it is the daily tire
some duty of the Khilasi.

The Book of Nature reveals the funny, sad, perceptive and gentleness of a man
called Ruskin. His life is not of anything dramatic and momentous incidents but of the tranquility
lost and regained of love, romance and nature, where time is always the catalyst of change. His
vision of nature is very broad, that is he does not see only its external aspects, but perceives in its
elements. He tries to peep into a deeper significance, an inner meaning. The wild exuberance of
natural objects like trees, mountains, rocks, stones, rivers and seas play an important role in the
stories of Bond. According to him nature pleases not only the senses, but also provides him with
spiritual comfort. There may not be a vehement expression of the affairs of the modern world in
his stories, but there is a concern for the preservation of nature.

Bond in “The Story of a Hill Station” peeps into the life of a Hill station. This story is
set amidst the mist and mellow magic of Bond’s beloved mountains. He gives a brief sketch of
Mussoorie in this story. People began to settle there in Mussoorie. They came over there for both pleasure and business. He elaborately describes about the tough task to go to Mussoorie before the advent of the railway and any other auto mobile. Bond describes the travel in hills in this story as Mr. Shore and Captain young merely scrambled up the tracks to get there and lady Eden used her pony “to canter along the paths and “up precipices” but in the good old, old days.... engaged a village bullock cart and proceeded in the direction of the Siwaliks as fast as only a bullock cart can go”. (59) His attraction towards nature urged him to come back from England and settle in Mussoorie amidst the enchanting nature. He has been influenced by Thoreau’s “Walden” and Richard Jeffries “The story of My Heart”. His attitude towards nature merges with the attitudes of Thoreau and Richard Jefferie. The enchantments of nature are medicinal for him. After the death of his father he turned towards nature to soothen his disturbed heart. He feels that cities do not give enough room for human feelings.

Nature makes one feel and realizes that he or she is small and insignificant. Bond feels that city people lack humbleness. Bond’s nature has been presented more effectively in Vanjani’s article as:

Over the years, he has established a symbiotic with these elements and communicates with them in a unique language. He seeks solace in the lap of nature from the higgledy piggledy world. Nature is in his inspiration it provides him the impetus for writing (143).

As Bond is close to nature, he has a positive self esteem. As he strolls down towards the Mall, the dazzling lights of the Doon Valley below and cool crisp night air make him comprehend. Though Bond resides in the cooler climes of Mussoorie, the sensuality of his prose never fails to warm the heart of his reader. In his interview with Achal Sinha in “Ruskin Bond: writing Youth” says, “The places where I’ve been for sometimes that have certainly influenced me because I’m not an inventive writer” (80). Description of natural beauty is Bond’s forte as Bond presents nature in all her splendour, it becomes the omniscient and omni potent in his stories.
Many writers do not bring in nature with aim of making it a part of the story, or part of the character or its effect on people. For instance if someone wants to write a story of a tree they might merely mention the tree along but Bond gives more details about what lives in the tree and also its effect on the people around it. Thoreau’s “Walden” in Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendalist in Conflict echoes Bond’s attitude to nature.

In the sunshine and the crowing of cocks, I feel an illimitable holiness

which makes me bless god and myself. The warm sun casts his incessant

gift at my feet as I walk along upholding his yellow words (163).

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