



Representation of Sustainable Development and Its Relation with Environment in the Selected Short Fiction of Ruskin Bond

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ABSTRACT: Focusing on the selected short stories of Ruskin Bond, this research paper illuminates the writer's concerns for environmental problems which are created by human beings for the sake of 'development'. Ruskin Bond writes about the places where he lives and collects his experiences on the degradation of the natural environment in his surroundings. His fiction exposes the destruction caused by the materialistic world to nature and to the self. For the writer, it is the man who analyzes all the natural entities on the basis of their value and usefulness for the human society disregarding and ignoring the function and importance of the concerned entity in the larger frame of ecosystem and its proper functioning. The study of Bond's stories will inculcate the very idea to preserve nature's originality among the readers and the practitioners of development processes in the modern world. Not being of a complaining nature, the study is aimed at the exploration of the intrinsic wilderness in human's nature and its influence on various modernistic development processes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'Nature' has always been the epicenter of man's culture and religion since the ancient times which is quite vividly visible in Vedic and Greek mythologies and the functioning of their respective civilizations. Vedas of ancient India exhibit in them their concerns for ecological balance, environment protection and seasonal cycles. The themes related to environmental protection were also prevalent in the fictional and non-fictional writings of the writers since earlier times. In this contemporary time, there are also such writers who take 'Nature' as a part of their texts through different genres. Whether it is fiction, poetry or drama, literature always provides the messages to human beings. But in this fast pace of life, in which a man is more inclined towards technological and advanced world, a short story is considered as a good genre to spread messages. A short story doesn't consume a reader's time and also fulfills a writer's purpose which is serious, for he has to present all the prevalent virtues and vices of the society in front of his readers. Ruskin Bond, a prominent short story writer, also attaches himself with this same purpose.

Ruskin Bond is a living legend who has been portraying life and experiences merged with environmental concern in his stories. His creative works are the celebration of the environment in which he lives, especially hills and mountains.

Bond states in an interview that "I live in a nice place and among nice people. I get inspiration from a lot of things around me –nature, hills, people and even insects". Nature charges and refreshes his creative vigor. The association with the natural environment imbues nature's attributes like innocence, simplicity and purity. Bond's characters live very close to natural environment. Unlike his well-known contemporaries who are especially concerned with social political turmoil, he takes up the issue of ecology and environment through his stories in most conspicuous manner. The problem of deforestation and pollution of environment and decay of lands and fields have been the subject of his stories. Bond is constantly scribbling about the hazard of pollution of environment. The planned destruction of trees on mountain slopes in the name of progress and development is the theme of his stories. "He does not follow avant-garde novelists and short story writers of our time and keeps himself aloof from modernism and postmodernism" (Sinha, Jauhari and Dave 2012).

The kind of natural world that Bond create in his stories comprises all the living organisms of the earth and, thus, is non-anthropocentric. Ruskin Bond intrinsically related with the very idea to preserve nature's originality.

He not only give a didactic lesson to his readers but reinforce them toward the fact that animals, birds and insects are as significant and dignified as human beings. These entities are shy, harmless by their nature and extremely sensitive to their surroundings. Amita Aggarwal opined that, "Bond's approach is both of a naturalist and a passionate seeker of joy" (2010). Bond expresses his view that all human beings are unambitious and simple by their nature. But the nourishment of the society inculcates the good or bad values. Bond follows the religion of 'Humanity'. In this religion, Bond not only covers the well-wishing things of human beings but he also takes plants and animals with same intensity. Bond has his intimacy with other plants and animals more than human beings because other living and non-living entities always follow the path of discipline which has been created by Nature. It is the only man who manipulates whole the planet earth to fulfill his own needs. Ruskin Bond is the writer who celebrates the beauty of Nature and asserts the importance of all animals and plants in his literary works.

II. SELECTED SHORT STORIES

The stories of Ruskin Bond seem to depict the idea of the problem which lies in the ownership of land by men, and the consequences of this: war, rape and tyranny. In the stories of Ruskin Bond, the concerns of critiquing the hegemonic relationship of the patriarchal and capitalist society with that of the mountains, flora and fauna of the Himalayas have been depicted with a sense of sentimental consciousness.

In the story, *Good Day to You, Uncle*, Ruskin Bond presents the scenario of those forest areas which are now about to be extinct in short time due to the deeds of man. The powerful human being is going to colonize all those wild areas from where he can fetch all the valuable things from natural resources without being conscious of the very act of oppression and domination of the assumed powerless state of Nature and other resources. He does all these things to develop or civilize himself. Man has suppressed the other inhabitants of the planet earth, who are less powerful than him, to that extent that they now have no right to live in those places where they can rightfully live. Bond recounts the plight of those forest inhabitants who are homeless because of man's controlling nature to all resources available on this earth. Human beings want to avail all those resources which are on this planet earth with their full strength and energy. In a patriarch structure, as the male party shows its tyranny over the weaker sections like women, weaker economic class, assumed inferior races, assumed lower castes etc., in the same way, the human being with all his equipments has suppressed other inhabitants who are weak in front of his power

and strength including forest inhabitants and cattle especially. Sometimes these forest animals and birds find their new residing area but they are not aware of the human's attack. "They did not know when men would appear again, with tractors, bulldozers and dynamite" (Bond 2008).

The story, *Where have all the Trees Gone*, encounters the deeds of those organizations which are destroying the natural entities for the sake of their development. The author states that, "the tree killed by the PWD, my brother by a truck" (Bond 2008). He also considers these trees as his own brothers with which he also associates himself emotionally. In this way, Bond thinks that the capitalist nature of man is responsible for the suppression of all those natural entities which are silent and weak and are rendered helpless against the authoritative figure of man. As these organizations cut the trees or the forests frequently for building up roads, dams and buildings in the name of development, Bond exhibits the sadness of the situation when he thinks of all the birds to which those forests had been home and now they have nowhere to go and are thus shelter less in the realm of concrete walls and buildings. He states that, "Forest birds, all of them, they will now be in search of some other stretch of surviving forest" (Bond 2008). This very phrase 'stretch of surviving forest' depicts the powerless and helpless condition of all these natural entities in front of man that the forests are continuously being destroyed and there is no scope of their survival anymore or their survival depends entirely on the mercy of man who is at the authoritative and deciding position of their fate.

In the story, *Dust on the Mountain*, Bond talks about the problems in the hilly areas which are created by human beings for their selfish purposes. At first, Bond shows the problem of those powerful institutions or persons who are a constant responsible machinery to undertake such politics of oppression and exploitation. Bisnu's mother, for example, encounters the problem of fire and collects the reminiscent of the beautiful post prior to this spree of development of the area and goes on to state, "The year your father died, there was so much snow the villagers could not light his funeral pyre for hours...And now there are fires everywhere" (Bond 2008). When the whole family is sitting outside and observes sadly and helplessly that thousands of the Himalayan trees are perishing in the flames. Bisnu feels sad when he thinks about the plight of the earth which he considers Mother and "thought of the trees at home – the walnut, the chestnuts, and the pines – wondered if one day they would suffer the same fate, and whether the mountains would all become a desert like this particular range. No trees, no grass, no water – only the choking dust of mines and quarries" (Bond 2008).

In this story, Ruskin Bond presents the scenario of wood loggers who come with contracts and are mostly belong to rich background. When Bisnu goes in search for a job to the city, the old man in the bus states that, "There were trees here once. But the contractors took the deodars for furniture and houses. And the pines were taped to death for resin" (Bond 2008).

In the story, *Flames in the Forest*, Romi is caught up in a situation where he finds himself surround by great flames and fire in the forest. He is shocked to see the horrific condition of those birds and animals who reside in the forest. This huge fire in the forest becomes a reason of the destruction of the precious flora and fauna of the forest. Romi states that, "Not only pheasants but smaller birds too were screaming across the road – parrots, jungle crows, owls, magpies – and the air was filled with their cries" (Bond 2008). All such hazards and horrific situations are created by the deeds of man or in other way, the indifference of man towards the well-being of the landscape and its various constituents. It is, thus, inferred that it is entirely the will of human beings whether they want to take care of the forests and their inhabitants which might help them gain developmental benefits or they can simply ignore whatever wrong or right is happening in the dark woods. This is evidently very unfair on the part of human beings who have no authority to dictate and dominate other living or non-living entities of this planet. If it is not possible for them to do any good to other such entities, they should rather, at least, not hinder and obstruct their own ways of survival and they can simply let them be on their own because it is humans who need dependence for the fulfillment of their needs on other natural resources, and not the nature which is self-sufficient and continuously evolving via its own processes.

Ruskin Bond captures the deeds of those human beings who are always trying to chase the other living and non-living entities of the planet earth without caring for their autonomous functioning. In the story, *Good Day to You Uncle* Bond narrates that, "There was a time when the forest on the banks 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 there remained only one old tiger in the jungle" (Bond 2008). The term 'anthropocentrism' is a conception which takes human at the center of all the activity and time. On this planet earth human being considers himself as the superpower and everything can be tamed by him. This phenomenon continues to teach the younger generation that human being is more capable than any other inhabitant of the planet Earth. Ramu, in the story *Good Day to You Uncle* says to his friend, "Perhaps we are a little better, in some ways. To be able to laugh and to be merciful are the only things that make man better than the beast" (Bond 2008).

These type of ideas also make the belief stronger that human being can conquer everything. In such a way, when visitors come to any wild place, they take it as their own place on which they can do anything.

In his stories, Bond himself remains happy and enjoys the company of even those insects which are on this earth for a short period of time. This creates a value within all to understand the importance of each and every living and non-living being on this planet earth. If humans have the right to live here on this earth with all the pleasures, the same is also the right of those who wander on the same planet. Man, thus, cannot be willingly or unwillingly be a hindrance in the way of autonomous functioning of various organisms and landscapes because that would certainly mean the power divides among the residents of the same planet. In the story, *Good Days to You, Uncle*, Ramu's father states that "A man needs the land as much as a tiger needs the jungle" (Bond 2008). All the living inhabitants of the earth have the same right to live in their concerned places. The other species of this planet earth except human being are more obliged to man. In this story, Bond states that there were almost thirty or forty tigers in the jungle earlier but the hunters and visitors have decreased their numbers in order to fulfil their purposes and now there is only one tiger remaining in the jungle. The hunters are also in search of that one tiger. But the tiger is more sincere towards the villagers. He thinks about the good for the villagers and their domestic animals. At once he had attacked a buffalo but he knew the villagers' reaction, "Since he had killed a buffalo, and he knew the villagers would not like it" (Bond 2008).

Ruskin Bond, as a writer, advocates the path of activism. Bond has been living in the natural surroundings for a number of years. He lives in the lap of Himalayas since his childhood. Such a great time spent in the realm of nature makes him more concerned for the voiceless non-human world and has developed in him a sense of understanding for the issues of the ecosystem which are not found in a third-party observer. Bond is active as a legitimate environmental advocate of his concerned place. He has the knowledge of plants, animals, landscape of the valleys in which he resides and the non-human entities of his concerned place which also signifies his legitimacy of being environmental advocate. Bond advocates those non-human entities which are unable to speak in human language and bear the objectification at the hands of unaware humans. This advocacy will help to that larger natural process in which the entire ecosystem and the living and non-living entities of natural world depend upon each other.

Bond suggest those positive ways with which man can develop sustainable and intimate interaction with natural world and such kind of a bond will develop and sustain between them which will liberate man from ulterior motives and nature in return, as it always has been, will provide nurture and culture in abundance.

Ruskin Bond is a writer who considers the right of graceful living of non-human entities as human beings on the planet earth in an order. Bond suggests the ways of coexistence with natural world. He renders an idea about those non-human entities which help to maintain the chain of existence. Bond doesn't want to propagate any didactic lesson to save the natural entities. He gives stress only on the fact that non-human entities are as dignified and significant as human beings are. Bond creates a sense of relationship of his reader with all the entities of the natural world. "Bond does not believe in environmental propaganda because one has to develop genuine concern keeping in mind the requirements of life in the mountains" (Aggarwal 2010).

Bond doesn't want to stop man's interaction with nature. Bond is in favor of tourism on hilly areas in Himalayas where man can realize his inner self and connect to it and gain intrinsic happiness. He also states that tourism will also keep the economy of the hilly areas sound. But he is conscious about those environmental problems which occur due to the luxurious hotels for tourists of urban management and the garbage produced by them. Bond states that there is a need to check the thoughtless practices of tourists and those contractors who are there for mining and 'developing'. This advocacy enriches the values with which man can acknowledge the importance of wild places. Ruskin Bond is advocating whole of the nature through his concern for a single tree in the following lines of his story, *The Gentle Banyan* where he quoted the lines of George Morris:

*Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now. (2008)*

Ruskin Bond has a major concern for the natural surroundings in which he lives and he advocates for its conservation, yet he doesn't try to attract the reader by depicting the beauty of nature or romanticizing the landscape in any way. Bond also states that there is an

increasing level in the number of tourists on the Himalayan Mountains. He also encounters the increasing number of Hindu pilgrimage in the hilly areas who do not always travel with the spiritual urge but with materialistic approach. Bond states that, earlier there was a little number of pilgrimages and the wild places remained untouched. But now, such places are being intruded more and more by the tourists. At one point, Bond takes it in a positive way because such interactions might lead to the development of a specific kind of connection and bond between the human and the non-human world and eventually a consciousness can be developed. But like Bass, Bond also doesn't want to attract his readers to the wild places. "Bond does not preach his conviction directly because he knows that everyone is governed by his own presumptions. He simply sets the contrasts of perspectives and invites the reader to make his choice" (Aggarwal 2010).

Thus, it is quite evident from the fiction writings of Ruskin Bond that the reader is not merely provided with the romantic idea of countryside nature or hilly sceneries or the depiction of animals and birds playing; rather, a strong and powerful meaning is left within the text to be deduced by the conscious reader of the reading and the writing. He seems to advocate the natural surroundings and various non-human entities therein which are voiceless and are subjected to numerous self-beneficiary purposes by man. The short stories are not merely complaining the situation; however, they are enriching the minds and hearts of the readers with such ideas, beliefs and values which will lead them to be an active part to conserve the nature and acknowledge its dignity and worth which has been there always but ignored most of the time.

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