

Essence of Natural Elements that are Portrayed in Ruskin Bond's Selected Short Stories

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond is a renowned Anglo Indian writer who is known for his simple yet beautiful writing style that makes the reader fall in love with his words. Where countries are fond of making weapons, missiles, nuclear bombs, Ruskin Bond keeps his readers away from such man-made harsh things and keeps on inspiring his readers to love Mother Nature in a more effective way. His writings are like the holy fresh waters of Ganges which are free from any social conflicts. He is not the James Bond of Hollywood but the Wordsworth of India. By emphasizing the importance of natural elements, Bond gives readers a sense of the sheer beauty and wonder around nature, allowing readers to appreciate its beauty and feel connected to it. His works are a tribute to the power of nature, and his writing style is often lyrical and poetic, making it a pleasure to read. His characters often find solace in nature, and the natural world is often portrayed as a source of healing and comfort. Bond's works are filled with lush descriptions of India's varied terrains and landscapes, providing readers with a vivid and intimate understanding of the beauty of nature.

Keywords: Flowers, Forest, Mountain, Nature, River, Tree

Ruskin Bond emphasizes the importance of preserving nature and natural elements through most of his writings. His works often serve as a reminder of the need for conservation and sustainability. In his remarkable works, he shows not only his love for nature but also his deep affection for animals. He rarely presented animals as monster or killer; rather he tried to show that they have also heart, love their life as we do. His writing is also marked by a strong sense of nostalgia and reverence for the past, as he often draws on memories of his childhood in the Indian countryside to provide inspiration for his stories. He is the man whose writings inspire children to love our Nature. In this paper an attempt has been made to explore the essence of natural elements that are portrayed in Ruskin Bond's selected short stories.

The Daffodils Case

In the short story, 'The Daffodils Case', Bond mentioned about village life that he could recall the smell of cowdung smoke, the ardor of Jasmine flowers. He could recall moments of water lapping

at the walls of mud houses. In this short story he portrayed the essence of daffodils and how precise the daffodils are. There is a mentioning of a cop who had been told by the authority to deal with the matter of stealing daffodils. In a conversation with Bond, he mentions that the days have gone when Ruritanian Princess and Maharani's diamonds and rubies were being lost.

The Fight

In the short story 'The Fight', there is a character whose name is Ranji, who discovered a beautiful, mesmerizing pool in the forest. During the hot summer days, Ranji used to come to this pool to quench his body and to get pleasure from that pool. The pool was so gentle, cold, and transparent that anyone could see the pebbles at the bottom of the pool. There was also a small stream that emerged with the pool. In that short story there was another character who introduced himself as Suraj. Suraj who was very much possessive towards that pool as he claimed that pool as his own and weighed a battle with Ranji. Observing some diving cum swimming skills in Ranji, Suraj stopped fighting with Ranji and eventually they became friends.

Time Stops at Shamli

'Time Stops at Shamli', is a beautiful short story, where time seems to get stopped. Shamli is a beautiful place at the foot hills of Siwalik Hills, that is situated at the foot hills of Himalayas. Along with its romanticism, horrifying comical, emotional and funny stuff, a glorious beauty of nature and its essence have been beautifully delineated throughout this short story. Bond mentions in this short story that whenever he travels from Delhi to Dehra and Dehra to Delhi, his train stops at Shamli railway station for five minutes. Shamli station was such a place where no one usually gets down or on the train. Bond was very much curious about this place and wanted to explore Shamli. Several times he wanted to get off the train at Shamli station but could not muster up that courage, and finally one day he got down and went to explore that beautiful forest of Shamli. His plan was to explore shamli all day long and to catch up the train in the evening for Dehradun. Seeing an only young man at station with Tonga, he gets to know about a hotel in Shamli and decides to spend a whole day there. Heera is one of the people, Bond meets in Shamli. Heera claims that he has been in Shamli for more than years. He is very old and works as a gardener at Shamli. Once there had had a lot of rain in Shamli and Malaria was everywhere. People could not stay long in Shamli. They used to go back into the hills. Heera was very fond of his flowers in the garden. He used to love his flowers in the garden as if they were his family. Since Malaria was spreading over Shamli, he had to choose between staying at Shamli or moving into the hills. But he had chosen to stay at Shamli, because there he could nurture his flowers. To him, flowers were his true companion in his old age. As he says: "I am tired now and old, but I am not tired of flowers". Heera was so much obsessed with the flowers in his garden that every month, there were new flowers in his garden, but ironically there were the same people in Shamli.

Sita and the River

'Sita and the River', is a beautiful story written by Ruskin Bond. It's a story of an innocent girl Sita, who lives with her grandparents on an island. In this story we get to see a "peepal tree" that has an important role in saving Sita's life. The peepal tree is situated in the middle of the island where Sita and her grandparents live. Her grandmother became ill. Her grandfather had to take

her grandmother on a boat to the hospital in Shahganj. After their leaving, Sita was all alone on the island since there was no one, who used to live except them. Their island was once flooded twenty years ago, but that peepal tree which stood in the middle of the island, had not been uprooted. The tree was very old. It was much older than the grandfather on the island. The tree was about three hundred years old. It provided shelter for birds and insects from across the river. Sita's grandfather has a belief that if any flood occurs on the island, that peepal tree is going to fall. Before her grandparents leave the island for her grandmother's treatment, she is told by her grandfather that she must climb the peepal tree if flood occurs. There was a heavy rain on the island. The river changed its color into white from green and blue. The island started sinking into the water of the river. Sita climbed into the tree as told by her grandfather. She found that water was everywhere. Sita caught the branch of the Peepal tree strongly, watching her island disappear. It is the same tree where the jungle crow settled. The crows present brought some company to Sita. The trees shook in the wind. Due to heavy rain and tide, gradually the tree fell down the river. The branches swung Sita about, but she did not lose her squeeze. To Sita, the tree was her friend. She did not want to leave the tree. The river was so furious that it had the capability to wash away the giant peepal tree. Then she heard a boy calling. There was a boy, Vijay. He then took her into his small boat. The flow of the river took them to a distant place. Ultimately, she managed herself to come back to her grandfather.

This story is all about the bravery, valour, confidence, and courageousness of the characters, and most importantly, Sita's survival along with the ways of nature. Bond tried to show the furiousness of natural elements through portraying the river, which turns furious, but ultimately the river becomes normal, kind.

The Kitemaker

Ruskin Bond states in 'The Kitemaker' – "There is a great affinity between trees and men. We grow at much the same place, if we are not hurt or starved or cut down. In our youth we are resplendent creatures, and in our declining years we stoop a little, we remember, we stretch our brittle limb in the sun, and then, with a sigh, we shed our last leaves". Bond finds similarities between men and trees. Both men and trees need each other to live their lives. They both grow if they are not hurt or starved or cut down. They are both full of energy, dazzling and full of vivacity in their youth, but in their old age they both stoop a little and move towards death.

My Father's Trees in Dehra

In 'My Father's Trees in Dehra', Bond shows his father's connection with the trees of Dehra, the town in India that Bond's father moved to when the narrator was very young. He also remembers that his father had a great love for the trees of Dehra, and would often take the narrator on walks to show him the beauty of the trees and also impart the knowledge about them. The trees of Dehra became a part of the Bond's father in a way that it became a part of the narrator too.

Bond mentions in this short story—

He was always happy when he was among trees, and this happiness communicated itself to me... As we sat there, doing nothing in particular—in the best garden time has no

meaning—I found that tendril was moving almost imperceptibly away from me and towards my father. (Bond, 2016, 299)

As his father was a worshipper of nature, Bond would love to think that the tendrils in their garden had affection for his father. Bond's father's love for trees and his attachment to the Dehra valley shaped Bond's own deep connection to nature in a way that Bond carries with him even today. He describes how his father was able to bring life and beauty to the land by planting trees, which provided shade and shelter to their family during the hot summer months.

Coming Home to Dehra

There is an autobiographical touch in most of the writings of Ruskin Bond. His 'Coming Home to Dehra' is not a different one. In this short story he describes his happy days that were spent well with his father and the unpleasant moments that he faced after the death of his father, when he had visited his home at Dehra and met his mother and stepfather. He expressed the kind of awkwardness, the lack of affection that he received from his mother and father. But he was fortunate enough because the natural beauty of Dehra attracted him and gave a lot of solace to his soul. It was the Nature who pleased Bond when he was in the state of being lonely, upset and heartbroken. As he states in this story:

I was ready to put up with him, provided he left me alone. I was even willing that my mother should leave me alone. There was a big window to my room, and I opened it to the evening breeze, and gazed out on to the garden, a rather unkempt place where marigolds and a sort of wild blue everlasting grew rampant among the litchi trees. (Bond, 2016, 292)

Tiger in the House

In 'Tiger in the House' we find that a tiger cub that was rescued by Ruskin Bond's grandfather and brought at home. It was named as Timothy. After coming into home gradually Timothy finds company with Toto(a monkey), and a puppy. Timothy would pretend to bite the author as the author became his favorite. As Bond states—

One of Timothy's favourite amusements was to stalk anyone who would play with him, and so, when I came to live with Grandfather, I became one of the tiger's favourites. With a crafty look in his glittering eyes, and his body crouching...and pretending to bite my ankles. (Bond, 2016, 144)

The Monkeys

In 'The Monkeys', Bond claims that the monkeys are handsome creatures as they have fur of silver grey color and their tails are long and sinuous. They leap gracefully from one tree to another. Unlike the bold crude monkeys, they are very courteous and respectful to each other. They play with each other like school boys. In the words of Colonel (a character in this story), Bond pens down – 'Never shoot a monkey – they're rather human'.

Death of the Trees

Ruskin Bond showed his condolences for cutting trees that became evident in his story 'Death of the Trees'. In 'Death of the Trees', Ruskin Bond enunciates his heartache towards slashing trees in the name of development. The trees such as deodars, pines, oaks and maples are loved by the narrator and these trees will be cut off by the PWD workers for a new bypass. The narrator expresses his grief because there will be no use for him opening the window and watching the scarlet minivets flitting through the oaks. There will be no birds because they will search for another forest to survive.

Bond mentions in this story:

Already they have felled most of the trees. The walnut was one of the first to go. A tree I had lived with for over ten years, watching it grow just as I had watched Prem's little son, Rakesh grow up... (Bond, 2016, 460)

Bond expresses his deep lamentation in this story that a huge number of trees have already been cut. Walnut was the first tree that PWD workers cut. He expresses his personal connection with walnut tree because Bond has lived with it for more than ten years. Bond drew a parallel connection between the growth of the walnut tree and Prem's son Rakesh. In this story Bond drew a sense of loss for the cutting of various trees such as walnut, deodar, oaks, maples and pines.

The Cherry Tree

In Bond's 'The Cherry Tree', Bond portrayed a true friendship between a boy, namely Rakesh, and a cherry tree, and the cherry tree's growing up through a lot of struggles.

In this story Rakesh is a simple boy who sown a cherry seed, and he was so happy when it came out of the soil as a plant. He cared for it by heart. He used to look at the tree every morning. Rakesh's cherry tree grew quickly in the rainy season. When the cherry tree grew to around two feet in height, a goat entered his grandfather's garden and ate the leaves of that cherry tree. But the tree grew because its main stem remained unharmed. Then one day, a woman who used to cut grass mistakenly cut the cherry tree. But the cherry tree remained tough and survived as if it didn't have any intention of dying. After a few years, when the rainy season was going on, Rakesh came to his grandfather's house to see his cherry tree. Though the rainy season was going on at that time, Rakesh gave some water to that tree because he wanted to persuade that cherry tree that he was there. As the tree started growing, gradually insects, birds, and caterpillars came to reside in it. When the tree grew up, Rakesh touched the trunk of the tree and said, 'I wonder, is this what it feels like to be God?'

The cherry tree was very special to Rakesh because he planted it. Rakesh's feelings towards that cherry tree were something out of the world. As it grew up, it had a lot of challenges, but ultimately it flourished beautifully. Rakesh didn't have the idea that one day a cherry fruit that he tasted and its seed would turn into a big, beautiful tree. When the tree grew up completely, he felt it in such a way as if he were in touch with God.

The Last Tonga Ride

Ruskin Bond described the beautiful town of Dehradun in his 'The Last Tonga Ride'. He described Dehradun as it used to be abundant in natural beauty where the walls of the bungalow, used to be covered by flowering bougainvillea, trees were everywhere and grandmother's house in Dehra was covered by various trees such as neem, peepal, mango and papaya.

There was a banyan tree, which amazed Bond. Bond figured out that the tree was older than his grandmother's house and older than his grandparents.

Bond mentions in this story:

The tree made the first move, the first overture of friendship, It allowed a leaf to fall. I caught and held it. I studied the leaf, running my fingers over its smooth, glossy texture. Then I put out my hand and touched the rough bark of the tree and this felt good to me. So I removed my shoes and socks as people do when they enter a holy place. (Bond, 2016, 324)

Bond here describes a moment where he felt that there could be a close connection between him and the banyan tree. When the tree's leaf fell, Bond took it as a greeting or a proposal of friendship. Bond touched the tree in such a way as if he met a close friend. Bond's affinity for the natural world is very pure, as seen in this story. The act of taking off one's shoes and socks before entering a temple or holy place is regarded as a way of showing respect and humility. Bond did this before touching the banyan, which was there in his grandmother's house. This might indicate that Bond finds a spiritual connection between him and the natural world.

A Crow for All Seasons

Crows are such kind of birds, which are often portrayed by various writers in their writings to show a gloomy, horror, and misfortune atmosphere. But Ruskin Bond's delineation of crows in 'A Crow for All Seasons' is full of positivity and kindness, yet hilarious. In a very humorous way, Bond highlighted a few characteristics of crows and their similarities and dissimilarities with humans. The story starts with the saying that crows have the habit of going early to bed and early to rise, which makes them healthy, wealthy, and wise. In this story, Bond shows that a crow, whose name is Speedy, is very energetic, has a good heart, and forgives Junior Sahib, a prosecutor who used to hurl stones at the crow and kill Speedy's cousin. But eventually Junior Sahib realized his mistakes and became a protector of the crows that followed him. Many humoral remarks are put in this story. For example, Bond pens down that crows have all the vices of humans but none of their virtues because both humans and crows eat hens' eggs instead of crows' eggs.

The Coral Tree

Bond not only just sees the nature but also he used to observe it immensely or deeply and smells the weather as he mentioned in 'The Coral Tree' that once he saw a green morning and he smelt the rain on the red earth. In this short story he describes how an urban life would be different from the surroundings of his grandmother's bungalow.

How Far Is the River

The poet starts his short story, 'How Far Is the River', by putting that there was a mountain between the boy (the speaker) and the river. Throughout the story he expressed his eagerness to watch the beauty of river. Since he had never seen a river before in his life, he wished to go near the river, touch the water of the river and to know it personally. So for the craving of viewing river, he went out of his house, when his parents went to visit their friends for the entire day. So it was perfect timing for him to move out of the house and to return back in such a timing, so that his parents would not know about his outing. During his barefooted walk to the river, he described the hill that was covered with lush green fern. There were some trees, those were entangled by creepers and an existence of great wild Dahlia which had a golden head. On his journey to the river, first he met a woodcutter. When he asked him about the distance of the river, then the woodcutter replied that it was seven miles. The woodcutter also warned the narrator that it would take three hours to reach and wasn't an easy road. Keeping this in mind and calling himself as a good walker, he moved forward. Gradually when he reached in the valley he met a girl, who was wearing rings in her nose and ears, arms with heavy bangles and holding a long curved knife for cutting grass. When he asked her about the distance of the river from the place where he reached, he was told twenty miles more. The poet laughed and ran down the path because according to the poet the girl had probably never been to that river because she said twenty miles without any hesitation. At last he met a boy who was driving a few goats down the path. When he asked that village boy how far was the river, he replied that it was not so far. After a long miles of barefooted walking, finally his dream of watching the serene beauty of river come into reality.

Conclusion:

Bond's concerns for the environment flourish in his writing that might raise environmental awareness in the mind of readers. In today's date, where we see the rapid growth of urbanization and industrialization, his works ignite the lamp for the need of preserving nature. Bond is not against the development but according to him there should be a systematic development without harming the nature. A sensitive touch and closeness with Nature can be found in most of his stories. The peacefulness, that lies in nature that might not be found in city life. Bond believes the same way Wordsworth believes, that in the cities 'the world is too much with us'. Ruskin Bond in an interview says that the inspiration for writing his works comes from nature; it comes from people, from relationships, from the books, from the other writers; it comes from just living. He also says that he is a very personal writer. He is the writer who can look inward and does not run out of things to write about.

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