

Ecofeminism and Environment in the Work of Ruskin Bond

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Abstract:

Just as preservation of Nature is the most important thing on the earth in the same way preservation of feminist sensibility is also the most important aspect in this human world. They are two sides of one coin, that is, spirituality. Feminism is spirituality. Spirituality lives inside nature everywhere. However, this paper aims at analyzing and highlighting dignity for both nature and women. This is a philosophy for saving feminism and the ecology. Ruskin Bond has made a contribution to preserve Nature and Feminism with his creative writing.

Key words: Ecocriticism, Feminism, Nature, Ruskin Bond, Spirituality and Nature Exploitation.

Wordsworth believed in the motherhood of Nature, fatherhood of God and brotherhood of Man. We can safely add to this the supreme motherhood of the Earth as we are all born, nurtured, mature and die on Mother Earth. This paper makes an attempt to observe representation of the natural world keeping in mind ecofeminist and ecocentric perspective in the work of Ruskin Bond. Ecofeminism is a new kind of philosophy which tries to find out similar characteristics among women and nature specially exploitation done to women and nature by male dominated culture. This theory provokes human beings to question our isolation and separation from nature. Ecofeminist

theory takes its roots from and assimilates ecology. Just as patriarchal society has oppressed women, in the same way nature has been exploited almost everywhere on the earth. Similarity arises between nature and women such as child bearing, nurturing and cooperation exist both among women and in nature. An idea emerges that both women and nature are equally oppressed by androcentric ways of thinking and action. This causes depletion of green environment on the earth.

Ruskin Bond believes that male dominated society wants to retain power and wealth forgetting the fact that man can attain wealth and power only in association with nature not by separating from nature. This disturbance on the earth is by virtue of separation of humans from nature and energetic cosmos. This reminds us of the concept of conservation of natural environment by humans and saving the Earth. Conservation of natural environment is an aspect of the work of Ruskin Bond which recognizes a different relationship between humans and the environment. It seems that ecofeminism and ecology both seek justice. The environment should be pollution-free air and be pure water, green earth and lush mountains free of dynamite. This environment is not only for human beings but also for other creatures of the earth. They also demand right to live on earth. Bond says in "All Creatures Great and Small" that: "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" (Complete 434). In this position they play a unique and dynamic role creating human culture and a natural process upon which all humans are biologically dependent. This paper says that women are similar to Nature in this orientation. They are an important natural social force. They contribute in the ecological movement and perform a unique role in social production. They enjoy and build up family. This awareness makes the status of women improve and the consciousness among women has been enhanced. Society and ecology can be richer after reconsidering

the handling and treatment of behavior by patriarchal society. The root of ecological and social crisis is patriarchy and its cultural construction in which patriarchy nurtures a male dominated society. This originally causes high tension of social relations and international conflicts on this earth. It is significant to point out that ecofeminism is not against development but seeks a kind of development which may increase or promote beauty of nature and does not at all support so called development which destroys nature in the name of development, industrialization and modernization.

This paper promotes a sense of dignity both for women and nature. Dignity for women will reduce crime against women in our civilized societies; and dignity for nature will bring greenery on this earth and this will definitely reduce ecological imbalance. Man passes his whole life around both of them. Life of man cannot go beyond this. In this regard, Indian philosophy praises promotion of women and nature. This philosophy has reiterated and emphasized the promotion of both. In the history of India, 'Chipko' movement is a practical example of ecofeminist and ecological movement run in Garwal Himalayas where Ruskin Bond resides, presently known as Uttrakhand, India. In terms of time, the 'Chipko' movement began earlier than other organized and large-scaled environmental movements.

Ecofeminism is an ecological movement which seeks natural liberation like women's liberation. With the promotion of eco-feminist ideas in the world, women have involved themselves in different environment movements. Ecofeminism sees from the eye of women rather than men. This emphasizes on women's identity. This intellectual movement finds out after comparing with men that women are still on a lower social status and have a weaker participation in employment, education, health care and family life. The basic reason for gender inequality and gender oppression in social life is an ideology and its social cultural system, that is, patriarchy. In order to escape from gender domination and obtain

individuality and social status, we must insist on female principles and eliminate androcentrism. Ecofeminism is a new social movement to eliminate gender inequality and strive for women's liberation.

This theory develops a sense of awareness for saving our green earth. The theory of ecofeminism reveals that patriarchy not only affects and dominates women but also affects and tries to dominate nature by way of so called development and industrialization. Androcentrism is harming greenery of environment and earth. Ecofeminism wishes to promote women's ideology for protection of ecology. Ecofeminism registers protest against male dominated culture and its exploitation is seen in surrounding societies. Women need attention for making our society and earth beautiful in all respects. Life of man is not whole without woman and human world is imperfect without nature.

Although Ruskin Bond's writings include immense sociological, cultural and historical value, yet his writings on environment are more significant. Bond's writings produce environment-friendly culture, a contemporary critical approach to literature, spreading awareness about saving the earth from scientific and industrial onslaughts. Love for nature and love of the natural world has been his natural theme since beginning his career as a writer and he paints marvelous pictures of trees, mountains, birds, flowers and insects, on the other hand he expresses concern for deforestation and depletion of greenery in the name of industrialization and development as well. The nature-writing tradition has been age-old in Indian English Literature. Ruskin Bond, like others in contemporary Indian literature, has been an eminent writer for showing his love and curiosity for nature. This paper aims at analyzing his contribution in view of ecological imbalance in Garhwal Himalayas by way of deforestation, stone mining, urbanization and irresponsible tourism in his writings.

We are producing pollution in the name of industrialization and development. In due course of time, a

debate for causing global warming has emerged to rethink how we interact with nature and environmental world. This produces different theories like ecofeminism and ecocriticism. Different thinkers, philosophers, scholars, artists and students of literary theory all over the world brought this into focus. Today these writings have appeared as a global movement to sensitize and broaden awareness among people to save earth by way of writings. Ruskin Bond, among other writers of English Literature, has been one of them to paint his love of and for nature to express concern about depletion of greenery through his colourful works. The high value that Ruskin Bond attaches to his vocation as a writer gives him a distinct place in Indian English Literature. This paper aims to analyze his contribution to the Indian English Literature in the light of ecological imbalance in Garhwal Himalayas by way of deforestation, stone mining, urbanization and irresponsible tourism in his writings. Prabhat Kumar Singh in his noteworthy critical work *Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond* comments appropriately on the worth of Ruskin Bond: "Bond may not give us a *Paradise Lost* but his lyrical sensibility is definitely capable of prizing the world of *Grey's Elegy*" (7). Bond's writings in the light of ecocriticism make us aware about saving the earth from scientific and industrial onslaughts. His interest and love of and for nature has been his well-known and well-accepted theme since beginning his career as a writer. He magnificently paints marvelous pictures of trees, mountains, birds, flowers and insects but he does not forget to express his concern for deforestation and depletion of greenery on the stake of industrialization and development. Ruskin Bond has been an eminent writer of the nature-writing tradition. He accepts in his short story *Death of the Trees* that "the explosions that continually shatter the silence of the mountains—as thousand-year-old rocks are dynamited—have frightened away ..." (Complete 493). Bond makes us feel that trees and mountains are one of the most significant factors in our environment and ecological imbalance starts after wounding trees and mountains

for self interest. In *Death of the Trees* he expresses his concern that

“... they have felled most of the trees. The walnut was one of the first to go. A tree I have lived with for over ten years watching it grow just as I had watched Prem’s little son Rakesh, grow up Looking forward to its new leaf-buds, the broad, green leaves of summer turning to spears of gold in September when the walnuts were ripe and ready to fall. I knew that tree better than the others.” (Complete 492)

Bond raises again a touching question in *Dust on the Mountains* through a character Bisnu ‘Why are there no trees here?’ and discloses the fact that:

There were trees here once, but the contractors took the deodars for furniture and houses. And the pines were tapped to death for resin. And the oaks were stripped of their leaves to feed the cattle—you can still see a few tree-skeletons if you look hard—and the bushes that remained were finished off by the goats! (Complete 291).

An example of irresponsible tourism may be significant from *Dust on the Mountains* in which a protagonist Bisnu discusses at night with his family members:

They sat outside their small house, watching the fire spread. A red line stretched right across the mountain. 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. (Complete 293).

This may be an example of Mussoorie but the reality is somewhat different and bitter all over the world. Further Bond gives a message of apprehension in *Tigre, Tigre, Burning Bright* that wild life is also affected and is in danger on account of so-called development. The story says that:

...there is a long stretch of heavy forest. There are villages on the fringe of the forest, inhabited by bamboo-cutters and farmers, but there are few signs of commerce or pilgrimage. 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. (Complete 379).

Further, the story says that birds and animals do not know why men appear in forests with tractors, bulldozers and dynamite. A pathetic expression is seen in the same story that “Sometimes, when the old tiger was very lonely, he gave a great roar, which could be heard throughout the forest. The villagers thought he was roaring in anger, but the jungle knew that he was really roaring out of loneliness” (Complete 385). The story again expresses that forests have been shrinking year by year “Ten years back, he would have had the jungle on his right in which to hide; but the trees had been felled long ago to make way for humans and houses, and now he could only move to the left, towards the river” (Complete 399).

Bond expresses deep concern for environment that one easily discerns throughout his writings. It is interesting to point out that although Bond appears to be a visionary in identifying the need for ecological balance, yet this concern has already been shown on different places by our ancient Indian culture. This is a well accepted fact that the destruction of forests means the death of flora and fauna, and finally the death of man. Thus destroying the ecological balance kills all forms of life. Winter turns warm, the monsoon is without rains, agricultural land gets eroded, rivers turn dry and God’s Eden becomes a wasteland. In the early 20th century, T.S. Eliot and his contemporaries were troubled by the changing values and moral depravity of mankind. Bond in the second half of the century is worried about the disturbance by ecological

imbalance. The ignorant man has been cheerfully hacking at the branch on which he is perched. Bond's call to turn towards the essence of life and recognize man-nature interdependence is aimed at preserving life, beautiful and powerful. It is ironical that a writer with such basic concerns for his time, with the ability to give shape to his thoughts in great stories, has not drawn sufficient academic interest. As a matter of fact, he deserves not only recognition as a significant Indian writer but as a human being with a definite philosophy of life which embraces mankind.

Bond gives an example of man's communion with nature in "The Cherry Tree". The story displays a strong personal relation between a boy, Rakesh and a cherry tree planted by him. The tree grew up with Rakesh and made a good companion to him. He said that the tree was significant to them because it was planted and nurtured by them. Rakesh touched the tree tenderly and thought of the wonders of a small seed. He whispered; "I wonder, . . . is this what it feels to be god? (Complete 227). The impact of the tree on the mind of Rakesh indicates Bond's great affinity with trees. It was not a normal relationship, but it ". . . hints at a supernatural as well as spiritual influence they have upon Bond" (Raphael 33).

Bond's writings bring his readers closer to nature realizing need for conservation and protection of ecology. Bond's understandings recognize his lasting contribution and identify him with India and Indian culture. As a true Christian, Bond loves his fellow beings and develops a deep understanding with them. Under the impact of Indian culture and ancient Hindu beliefs, he imbibes the essence of Hindu spirituality in his works.

The novel, *Delhi is Not Far*, depicts the healing power of nature in the hills. An enthusiastic narrator insisted on his fellow Suraj to accompany him to the hills. He was confident that Suraj who suffered from occasional fits would be cured by Mother Nature in the hills. He recalled his trip to the hills covered with pine, cicadas, walnut, apricot, oak, deodar and

numerous other trees and shrubs. He recalled the enchanting and magnificent scenery of the rising and setting sun behind Nanda Devi. He went to the extent of asserting that the life was incomplete if one had not lived or visited the mountains. We are reminded of Wordsworth and his strong belief in the efficacy of Nature.

Bond firmly believes that communion with the soul of nature is possible, for it is basically the same as the soul of man. A close contact with nature seems to raise the person not only morally or emotionally but also spiritually. Its influence is elevating which purifies the soul and mind of the person who allows his senses to be aware of the things which cannot be seen or heard superficially. A man can only see them through his mind's eyes. Though Bond's descriptions are realistic, at times he has also given an imaginative touch to them. He feels that mountains can influence not only the living people but even the dead lying in the graves. In "The Funeral", Bond has imagined that the love for mountains and their serene beauty may endure even after death. The boy, whose father was dead, followed mourners to the cemetery and he looked at the

. . . higher ranges of the Himalayas and the eternal snows. The graves in the cemetery were so laid out that if their incumbents did happen to rise one day, the first thing they would see would be the glint of the sun on those snow-covered peaks. Possibly the site had been chosen for the view. (Complete 227)

It goes without saying that Wordsworth is often criticized for his limitations expressing treatment of nature. His treatment is one-sided or unrealistic because he did not present nature 'wild'. But Bond's treatment cannot be termed as such because he has portrayed nature 'mild' and 'wild' which creates and nourishes as well as destroys. He takes keen interest in both the beautiful and rugged aspects of nature. He does not avoid rough, abrupt and violent things in nature besides dealing with smooth, musical and elegant aspects of nature. Dealing with both beautiful and direful aspects makes Bond's portraiture

natural and realistic. In the stories *Angry River*, *Earthquake* and *Flames in the Forest*, Bond has dealt with destructive forces of nature. This is well accepted and well known fact that man is helpless in the face of natural calamities, but the reaction of the characters exhibits Bond's balanced attitude regarding life. The fact described is noticeable and remarkable in these stories of Bond. This is an extraordinary reaction of ordinary human beings who remain quite normal even after the disaster is over. They knew that nature manifests itself in different forms and ways. If sometimes it is furious, it is kind too. Their reactions cannot be termed as unrealistic or idealistic because there are thousands of people in India or other countries who are victimized by the fury of nature every year in one way or the other. They are not able to run away, for they cannot afford to do so. They live in constant fear of disasters. In a way this makes them immune to all tragedies which happen to them. It develops their resilience in the face of tragedies and this is what one perceives in Bond's fiction.

The paper presenter in an interview with Ruskin Bond has also tried to know the reason of his attachment with nature:

Kuldip: Sir, you have been writing on the greenery of Dehradun and environment which is a natural aspect of your writing. Did you receive this aspect by virtue of your father's impact or from somewhere else?

Bond: I grew up in Dehradun. At that time it was a small town and very beautiful valley, so naturally I grew up close to nature, to forest, trees and my father was also interested in nature and as time passed I became even closer to it.

Kuldip: Sir, You have been called a 'Nature Writer'. Please comment.

Bond: The world of nature has always been close to me. Animals, birds, insects, trees, flowers, fruits, streams, the sea, mountains, deserts all play a part in my stories.

Kuldip: Apart from nature, what else inspires you?

Bond: People. People are stores for millions of stories.

Kuldip: Sir, what is the basic theme and motive in your writing?

Bond: I just tell a good story about interesting people. I like writing about children, about nature, about innocence in general and India is a country where there is no dearth or no shortage of stories or of people who have stories to tell.

In conclusion, it can be said that ecology and feminism have always been fruitful to human beings. They have been loyal to all creatures from time immemorial even when they cut and destroy nature. Nature remains silent and serves all without expectation. Mother earth gives all a serene and calm life and man finds true pleasure at length. Her greatest gift to man is an ability to think. Thus androcentrism needs to learn from nature and the lesson is pretty clear—‘save and promote women and greenery on earth for peaceful life, growth and fulfilment’. Therefore, this paper makes an effort to promote and encourage exchange of ideas in literary world for new nature writing with an innovative approach. Definitely, this may be a good attempt to save our earth. Bond, being very optimist, also supports this view in *Death of the Trees* that ‘Never mind. Men come and go; the Mountains remain’ (Complete 493).

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