



The Research Analytics

(A Peer Reviewed and Open Access Journal)

16

Resonances and Dimensions of Calm in Ruskin Bond Narratives: An Eco-Spiritual Perspective

Dr. Suvashree Suvadarshinee

Assistant Professor, Basic Sciences and Humanities (English), Silicon University,
Bhubaneswar Odisha, India.

Abstract: Nature and literature have an infinite role to play in maintaining the balance in human life. The need to connect and isolate as binary opposites is nature's way to help maintain tranquillity in our existence. Eco-spirituality is an emerging theory that celebrates the human connection to a belief system that nature is sacred and fragile. Ruskin Bond in his writings has illustrated this affinity towards nature. His longing to connect and return is nostalgic and pure making one find the visual sacredness of nature. The research paper will attempt to identify the eco-spiritual elements in Bond's *The Night Train to Deoli*, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, and *Rain in the Mountain*. The way Ruskin Bond had treated nature with innocence, love and beauty, a study of the spiritual connections to nature in these tales may bring the much-needed calm and equilibrium to the ecological concerns at present times.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, eco-spirituality, visual sacredness, affinity, tranquillity, equilibrium

"Live close to nature and you'll never feel lonely. Don't drive away those sparrows out of your veranda; they won't hack into your computer".
--Ruskin Bond

The survival of the Homo sapiens is a miracle we would like to outlive. Nature has an amazing role to play in the metamorphosis of this evolution. The connection of humans with nature is not only of dependence physically or geographically but also psychologically and spiritually. We need success and solace concurrently. The binary opposites of connection and solidarity are the balance nature has maintained for tranquillity. When people start to realise the concerns of global predicament and environmental issues, it had become fatal. Eco-criticism is a field of study which concerns with the interdisciplinary studies related to environment and literature covering aspects correlated to climate crisis and its explorations in literature. This crisis was first discovered by scientist and inventor Guy Stewart Callender (1898-1964) who predicted the possible predicaments the world may face in the upcoming years due to rising carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere to global temperature. [1] In literature, the idea was first originated by Joseph Meeker as "literary ecology" in 1972 in his *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. The term was first used by William Rueckert in the essay *"Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism"* in 1978.

With the publication of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in 1962, awareness and experiments in eco-criticism diversified 1980 onwards. Eco-feminism, wilderness and pastoral became common themes. Eco-Spirituality is an emerging theory connected to the interdependent connection between humans and nature. The sanity and purity of our ancestors as nature worshippers was prevalent across time and culture. The sun, moon, stars, lakes, rivers, sea,

trees, forests, and sky, have significance as a part of natural connectivity with nature. This connatural familiarity may not appear rational but gives a reason to cherish nature in a closer sphere. The word eco-spirituality is derived from the Greek work 'oikos' which means home. [2] Eco-spirituality as a theory reminds us to appreciate the treasure of home as the only place to be together.

Critics and writers have made innumerable contributions to the cause of sustainability and ecological balances. Nature has its own way of attraction and is comparable to the mystic gods. The silent, calm and serene nature can also be loud, wild and roaring. It can be constructive, nurturing and destructive as well. Whatever aspect, it has never failed to amaze the romantic in a writer. Ruskin Bond is an Indian writer who has made his mark in the literary arena with some of his exemplary works. His works are inlaid with a sense of innocence, serenity and mysticism. It appears he writes something for everybody.

Most of Ruskin Bond's works are visuals of nature inlaid in between human spaces. Whether it is a story, short story, fiction, novella, or a children's book, the vivid description of places, natural world and scenes makes it life-like. His short stories are unexpected in ways the description of nature takes over, very subtle but impactful. It appears Bond was trying to not only write what he saw, but also what he felt then, and later his feelings which were evoked by the memories of the same. We find a devout connection in his collection of short stories *The Night Train to Deoli*, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, and *Rain in the Mountain*. Though all his works display similar devotion and longing, the study of these tales would help analyse the spiritual longing of Ruskin Bond towards his homeland's topography and people. Unlike other novels or pieces of writing where the eco-spiritual elements are clear, in Ruskin Bond's short stories they appear in flashes interwoven in the human world. It is a clear reminder that devotion may not be separated by time and space. Even in the materialistic world, one may be spiritual in everyday life. The devotion of a person need not be defined in words.

According to Dr. Maya Spencer: "Spirituality involves the recognition of a feeling or sense or belief that there is something greater than myself, something more to being human than sensory experience, and that the greater whole of which we are part is cosmic or divine in nature. Spirituality means knowing that our lives have significance in a context beyond a mundane everyday existence at the level of biological needs that drive selfishness and aggression. It means knowing that we are a significant part of a purposeful unfolding of Life in our universe."

[3] Spencer's exploration of spirituality is more like an inner quest for self. It is beyond the cognitive belief system. It is to understand that we are somehow connected to a greater something and that we are never alone. The 'process' is healing, affirming, securing, to love and be generous when one can. A spiritual seeker confirms that many things are beyond logic and reason and the universe and everything is 'the deeper truth of not knowing or the unknown.' The eco-spiritual elements are like the charms of a higher being giving freshness to the human realm. Ruskin Bond lived in Mussoorie the "Queen of Hills". Most of his works are semi-autobiographical with his own insights of nature and individuals he met with their experience. What is surprising is his urge to fuse the natural elements with human existence and unexciting life. The imagery they present is a stark contrast to the story which looks ordinary yet distinctive. For example: *The Night Train to Deoli* is a short story collection. The stories excite the reader with vibrant graphic descriptions of a small village station Deoli and the writer's experience in his journey. We can feel Bonds' nostalgia and memories of the place and people. "...it marked the beginning of the heavy jungles of the Indian Terrain. The train would reach Deoli at about five in the morning, when the station would be dimly lit with electric bulbs and oil lamps, and the jungle across the railway tracks would just be visible in the faint light of dawn." [4]

"I wonder what happens in Deoli, behind the station walls. But I will never break my journey

there. It may spoil my game...I never break my journey at Deoli, but I pass through as often as I can.” [4]

The childhood and youth he had spent there, is like the beacons’ call to him. Bond creates his numinosity in the station and girl much before the girl even appears. The station and its description with essence of romanticism which may be defined as eccentric make it appear elusive. If the station would not be described as strange and unknown, then the girl who appears may not be equally enchanting. His hopes to turn back in time are an excuse to return to the dream like state where his adolescence had found passion. As we read, we find the train making its way through the forest greenery towards the first dawn. The visual is similar to the awakening of realisation which we may have overlooked or dismissed as insignificant.

“A lemon-coloured butterfly settled on the end of grandmother’s knitting needle, and stayed there while the needles clicked away. I made a grab at the butterfly, and it flew off in a dipping flight and settled on a sunflower.” [5]

“The peepul was a cool tree to sit beneath. Its heart-shaped leaves spun round in the faintest breeze, sending currents of cool air down from its branches. The leaf itself was likened by Ayah to the perfect male torso—a broad chest tapering down to a very slim waist—and she told me I ought to be built that way when I grew up.” [6]

The writer’s attempt to merge reality with illusion is evident in his minuscule details he had listed. A simple description of everyday life is refined as a masterpiece, giving glimpse not only of present but also the future. The ‘peepul tree’ is the present where the ‘lemon butterfly’ is the future which appears fleeting but then the butterfly has to settle on the sunflower which looks towards the sun, a divine presence which stabilizes the life source.

“But the trees seem to know me. They whisper among themselves and beckon me nearer. And looking round, I find that other trees and wild plants and grasses have sprung up under the protection of the trees we planted. They have multiplied. They are moving. In this small forgotten corner of the world, my father’s dreams are coming true, and the trees are moving again.” [7]

“But the trees remembered me. They bowed gently in the breeze and beckoned me nearer, welcoming me home. Three pines, a straggling oak, and a wild cherry. I went among them, acknowledged their welcome with a touch of my hand against their trunks—the cherry’s smooth and polished; the pine’s patterned and whorled; the oak’s rough, gnarled, full of experience. He’d been there longest, and the wind had bent his upper branches and twisted a few, so that he looked shaggy and undistinguished. But, like the philosopher who is careless about his dress and appearance, the oak has secrets, a hidden wisdom. He has learnt the art of survival!” [8]

The passage of time evokes memories and the burden of duties often takes away the pleasure of stopping to admire nature. As the days mount to months and years, the suppressed feelings become emptiness difficult to close. Ruskin Bond finds the same nostalgia and sublime happiness among nature. When he compares the trees to someone who shelters, personifies them with human feelings and emotions, justifies them as a close lost friend who still remembers, and the philosopher who understands you inside out, he connects his reader to a feeling of importance and acceptance. Only someone who defies desires and status could have such tolerance. Nature has always stood waiting for human to find their way back, to realize the need to have intimate connections and build the bond of relationship.

“The trees made the first move, the first overture of friendship. It allowed a leaf to fall.”[9]
“... rushed into the darkness and the bright lights of Dehra were swallowed up in the night. New lights, dim and flickering came into existence as we passed small villages. The stars too were visible and I saw a shooting Star streaking through the heavens... Ayah had once told me, that stars are the spirits of good men.” [9]

“Never mind. Men come and go; The mountains remain.” [10]

The undying faith Bond shares with nature is probably what no other writer other than Wordsworth had. If one reads *Ramayana*, we share the journey of not only Lord Ram but his instincts with the natural environment. The collaboration of God and Nature is found at all times and places through the book. The abundance of nature is described as fulfilling and nurturing.

“...and I stood there for almost an hour, a disembodied spirit, romping again in the shallows of our secret pool. Nothing had really changed. Time is like that”. [11]

The passage of time highlights the materialistic world and human nature. The visible relief when visiting a heavenly mountain, the excitement of sea, and the feel of wind on the face idealizes the escape plan of human. The delight of time and grim realities of life juxtaposes each other. The experience of these treats goes a long way to preserve the unity of a harmonious life.

“It always remains the same with mountains. Once you have lived with them for any length of time, you belong to them. There is no escape.” [12]

If one wants to derive spirituality through Ruskin Bond's short stories, probably there is none. But, as one reads his stories and stops to admire them, the hidden layers of spirituality start to unveil. He was a nature lover who found ways and means to add ingredients of natural bits and parts in places. The impact nature had on him was like a drug. The addiction was to place them everywhere amidst anywhere. The emotional attachment he feels is more important to him than the success in his literary profession. He left London and settled in India, for his longings to the place. To quote Pat Buckley: “*I can find God in Nature, in animals, in birds and the environment.*” The concerns of ecology crisis can only be solved when people realise the calm and awareness that comes with the interaction with nature. Bond makes sure his descriptions about nature are not overt. They are just enough to sooth the soul by their presence. The urban life has undergone changes which are part of changing time and politics. We find in Bond's tales the unyielding spirit to find and secure the roots of what we have.

Bond writes:

“It is still here, hidden by petrol pumps and lost within 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 refuse we leave behind.” [13]

He understands the change and laments what he has lost. The connection he builds with nature is more like a recluse holding on to the last hope. The trysts and trials with natural settings indicate his persistence with the God's creation. As tangible as it may seem, the scriptures are bounded by the serenity of the nature around us. It may be noticed that the more one feels spiritual; the more they are drawn close to nature. Somehow this connection makes one feel

closer to the divine universe. A quiet mind, a grounded soul and an intuitive instinct are the benefits of the eco-spirituality.

Bond teaches us spirituality through his tales in different ways. Through his short stories he does not want to create any miracle in literature. He humbles his experience and dedicates it to the human relations, and nature which is forever giving, static and dynamic at the same time. He gives a better understanding of human nature, helping to appreciate things as they are. He makes one realise through his tales that stressing or controlling changes nothing, after all great changes happen subtly without noise. Compassion, empathy, patience, selflessness, respect are two-way processes. Having gratitude and humility increases the beauty in imperfections making it perfect. Keen awareness and knowledge create opportunity. Through his amalgamation of understanding and experience Ruskin Bond clearly balances the positivity and peace within us by a clean and healthy environment. When one moves away from nature forgetting the bond, we start to self-destruct. The fragile ecology has the healing powers of sacredness which makes one whole even in fragments. It is essential to control, commit and elevate the beauty of the divine forces present in the environment. Bond's communication with nature through his works is like cultivation of emotional and spiritual overflow bringing fulfilment and depth in life. His stories capture the intricacies of the ecosystem with its noise and silence, its expanse and details, peace and purpose, faith and spirituality and with self – introspection and meditation. Bond's diminutive stories generate the harmony of mind, body and soul exploiting the inner peace by connecting it more deeply with the present. The waves of time reflect wisdom and clarity like being in a meditative trans-like state, where the visual images of nature take over senses creating equilibrium of relief and unification of a greater whole.

As Bond notes:

"I feel drawn to the little temples on lonely hilltops with the mist swirling round them, and the wing humming in the stunted pines, they absorb some of the magic and the mystery of their surroundings and transmit it to the questioning pilgrims".[14]

Such tranquillity that we seek is not distant or divine, but something more near and perceptible. This can be found in the quiet rustle of the leaves, in the gentle fall of rain or in the distance echoes of the valleys. This communication with nature is not an escape on Bond's part but rather a return to self. A return to the balance, innocence, and the lost rhythm of life itself. His tales are not only reflections of nostalgia but also ruminations to find the wisdom that guides humankind back to its roots. The sacredness of the mountains, the murmur of the streams, the whispering among the trees and the fading light are all lessons of endurance and strength. The 'calm' is a storm, that fills the silence with meaning. He clarifies that love of nature is love of self. With its fragile and delicate appearance in the flowers and fragrances, nature roars out in whispers. Bond's eco-spiritual vision is to pause, to observe and to listen to this roar, that carries with it the harmony of mind, body and soul. Though the mountains do not move, the trees grow and the winds flow in their own quiet way, Bond's stories remind us that what really finds its way home is the conscious act of belonging to the earth. Somewhere in a quiet corner, we find the dimensions of compassion and coexistence. The stories are profound in their simplicity and unhurried in their pace, a soothing attempt to heal the rift between human and nature. Bond's short stories transcend the limitations of language, culture, religion and country. They are gentle reminders that awareness of life and reconnection with nature is what human has been trying to attain but has failed. The inner peace of mind mirrors the spiritual awakening and awareness of modern human conditions that often equals progress with alienation. His narratives are an ethical force that celebrates the beauty of nature and human as they coexist, accepting the global environmental degradation, technological advancements and material

accumulations but not at the cost of inner peace. Ruskin Bond's tales bring back the sensitivity to have faith in humility, find spirituality in survival, and resonance of calm in everyday life.

Works Cited

- 1) "Guy Stewart Callendar." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 13 May 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Stewart_Callendar. Accessed 13 May 2024.
- 2) "Oikos." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 13 May 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oikos>. Accessed 13 May 2024.
- 3) Spencer, Maya. *What Is Spirituality? A Personal Exploration*. Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2012.
- 4) Bond, Ruskin. "The Night Train to Deoli." *The Night Train to Deoli and Other Stories*, Penguin Publishers, 2016.
- 5) —. "The Photograph." *The Night Train to Deoli and Other Stories*, Penguin Publishers, 2016.
- 6) —. "My First Love." *The Night Train to Deoli and Other Stories*, Penguin Publishers, 2016.
- 7) —. "My Father's Trees in Dehra." *The Night Train to Deoli and Other Stories*, Penguin Publishers, 2016.
- 8) —. "From Small Beginnings." *The Night Train to Deoli and Other Stories*, Penguin Publishers, 2016.
- 9) —. "The Last Tonga Ride." *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, Penguin Publishers, 2011.
- 10) —. "Death of Trees." *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, Penguin Publishers, 2011.
- 11) —. "As Time Goes By." *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, Penguin Publishers, 2011.
- 12) —. *Rain in the Mountains: Notes from the Himalayas*. Penguin Publishers, 2009.
- 13) —. "The Last Time I Saw Delhi." *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, Penguin Publishers, 2011.
- 14) —. *Landour Days: A Winter's Journal*. Penguin Global, 2004.

Additional References:

- 1) Agarwal, Rina. *Nature and Spirituality in Indian English Fiction*. Atlantic Publishers, 2018.
- 2) Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1995.
- 3) Chaudhuri, Supriya. "Eco-Spiritual Consciousness in Contemporary Indian English Literature." *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2019, pp. 45–58.
- 4) Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2019.
- 5) Gupta, S. K. *The Green Aesthetic in Indian English Literature*. Sarup & Sons, 2015.
- 6) Nayar, Pramod K. *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*. Routledge, 2014.
- 7) Naess, Arne. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement." *Inquiry*, vol. 16, no. 1–4, 1973, pp. 95–100.
- 8) Norberg-Hodge, Helena. *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*. Sierra Club Books, 1991.
- 9) Sharma, Meenakshi. "Nature and Spirituality in the Works of Ruskin Bond." *Journal of Indian Literature and Culture*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2020, pp. 101–112.
- 10) Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. Ticknor and Fields, 1854.
- 11) White, Lynn Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science*, vol. 155, no. 3767, 1967, pp. 1203–1207.