Philosophical Interpretation of Ruskin Bond’s *Book of Nature*.

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond is an Anglo English writer. His ancestors were Europeans who came to India and lived here during the British Raj. As a child he spent his days with his parents and maternal grandparents in Dehradun and Mussourie. He was enchanted by the pleasant weather and the flora and fauna of the place, which he has celebrated in his literary works. After the Independence of the country, he decided to continue living in India as he couldn’t forsake his love for Nature that he developed here. This article will analyze the aphorisms, phrases, statements and some poems in his book, *Book of Nature*, as they are loaded with wisdom. All of them will be critically analysed to discern the philosophy behind them. Upon a close study it is found, that Bond’s intention is not just to eulogise the beauties and bounties of Nature, but also to use it as a context to share some general truths of life and educate people. Some are somber while others are hilarious in tone, nevertheless they carry a message. And the manner, in which they are seamlessly included in the Narration, in a very lucid style, is a testimony to the excellent craftsmanship of Ruskin Bond as a writer.

Key words: love, nature, people, understand, wisdom, world.

Introduction:

Ruskin Bond is a name to reckon with when it comes to appreciating the Indian sensibility, in terms of the love for the scenic beauty of hill stations of India. Especially during the summers, these places are very pleasant climatically with an infusion of flowers and blossoming trees all over. No wonder, Shimla used to be a summer capital of the colonial masters to beat the oppressive heat of the plains.

Bond started writing at an early age and his first novel *The Room on the Roof*, which he wrote at the age of seventeen and won the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize, in 1957. Since then he has been a prolific writer and has written fiction, non-fiction and anthologies. One of his novellas, *A Flight of Pigeons*, was made into a film. Says S.K. Desai in the journal article, *Tales for the Mountains*, “He has made a special niche for himself as an excellent short story writer and a prolific writer for children” (101). In the past some of his short stories have been adapted to TV series as well. Ruskin Bond has been awarded with the Sahitya Academy Award in 1992, Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014 for his contribution to the growth of children’s literature in India.

One of the striking features of Bond’s writing is that he steers clear of sex and violence. This is not only refreshing, but also accentuates on a different approach to writing. And his literary works for adults are equally captivating and mesmerizing and this study will reveal, are full of wisdom. Bond’s writings are mostly autobiographical and reveal that he loves Nature in a sense that is spiritual. He finds himself at home among the trees and even in the wild, so much so, even a walk alone in the night gives him happiness. Says Bond in *Book of Nature*,

“You could call it my vice, since it is stronger than the desire for wine, women
or song. To get on to the open road fills me with joie de vivre, gives me an exhilaration not found in other, possibly more worthy, pursuits”. (85)

In the text under study, some of the aphorisms poems and statements are critical analysed for a philosophical understanding. Some of them are as under. The statements, short poems and aphorisms are mentioned in bold on top and their philosophical interpretations are decoded below them.

Live close to nature and you will never feel lonely.

Echoing the thoughts of William Wordsworth, Bond mentions that living within the close proximity of nature is like having constant companions around. Be it trees, flowers or mountains, even the wilderness, it’s a source or energy that is forever a solace to disturbed minds.

**FIREFLY IN MY ROOM** *(a short poem)*

This short poem mentions that the author had left the window open to let some fresh air, when a firefly enters and illuminates intermittently, the darkness of the room. It is not only a mini-spectacle to the eyes but a source of happiness if the day has been unhappy. So Nature provides happiness, provided one is sensitive to it.

… “**wild flowers are rewarding, because the best ones are often the most difficult to find**”.

It is a reward to find a wild flower as it not seen in the plains and vegetation. Just like, some of the best people, talent and intelligence, love is hard to find. But once found, is a reward.

Loveless lives, unloved gardens.

The above four words are pearls of wisdom. They give an insight to the psychology of people. It has been observed that there happens to be space around homes where people live, some cultivate it into beautiful gardens while others are just neglected and abandoned. In the latter case, the owners of the place are too busy or may be distressed and don’t have the inclination to tend to the space which could be converted to a garden. Whereas happy people are sensitive to the needs of plants and would tend them. The condition of the garden of a home reveals the happiness quotient of the inmates.

No night is so dark as it seems.

The above is both literal and symbolic. Usually night is associated with sinister and dark forces; however Bond refutes the negative association to night. For, the stars, the moon and the night-time birds and insects in the dwelling places of human beings make a night beautiful. Symbolically it means that difficult times in life are not that tough as they seem to us. After all, tough situations make people strong.

If only motorcycles sounded like jungle owl.

It refers to the noise that city life has to bear, among them the shrillest seems to be of a motorcycle. The hooting of the owl in the silence of night is any day pleasant than the motorbike sound. So again, sounds of nature are soothing while those of city are distressing.

There was no room in the world for a mountain lion and me.

Full of worldly wisdom, it mentions the tragedy that the Brave have to face. He explains a situation where a leopard is found roaming by some villagers. Bond supports the poor animal as its dwellings are being poached for jungles are being cleared to satiate Man’s needs. The big cat is able to survive the many traps that are set to
kill him. Finally one day, a group of men are successful in killing him and the carcass is tied to pole and carried by two men all around the village. One that was difficult to defeat and aroused fear was paraded as a sign of bringing humiliation to the leopard. Bond says these lines belong to a poem written by D.H.Laurence, and the import is; the fearless, the bold creates insecurity and fear among the mediocre. So the latter use all tactics and games to entrap and finally annihilate their presence. And getting rid of them is the show-cased as a sign of victory.

We hurry, hurry in a heat of hope-and who has time for roadside fires, except perhaps, those who must work on the roads in all weathers.

These lines refer to the maddening rush of the modern day life, which is primarily earning and spending. Everyone seems to be in a rush and nobody has the time to watch the trees or the bonfire on the side of a road. The author talks of the disregard to the natural surroundings, perhaps that’s why there is a problem of unmanaged garbage and pollution.

Just as tall men are often the most gentle, so are big trees the most friendly.

Here the author is referring to trees like Banyan that have extensive horizontal growth resulting in a cool shade that it can provide to a large group of people sitting beneath it. We come to know that tall men are gentle while short one could be scheming and clever.

Woodman, spare the tree!

This four-lined poem by George Morris is a plea to not cut down trees

SILENT BIRTH  (a short poem)

This makes an interesting comparison on how a seed is born with the way a human is born. A tree comes out of earth, a bud opens, a flower turns to fruit, silently. It is human that creates a noise while taking birth. So he suggests understanding the importance of silence.

The rain was more intoxicating than the alcohol.

This above statement mentions the calmness that rain brings along with itself.

To live in harmony with nature we must become good listeners.

The author wants to say, if we appreciate bird-song, whistling breeze, swishing of leaves, there absence and presence would make a difference. But since we don’t, the natural habitation is being destroyed as a result what we hear is all sorts of traffic noise.

Like politicians, these birds love listening to their own voices.

The above line is taken from section VIII titled ‘The Winged One’ and is explaining about one mountain bird called barbet. It has a “monotonous far reaching call” (192) and sings for a long time. Since it is found in mountains understandably no one’s listening but it goes on for a long time. This characteristic is compared to the politicians who are believed to do a lot of lip service and deliver harangues.

Happy the cicadas, for they have voiceless wives!
Pity the female cicadas, for they have singing husbands.

The above two statements are a light banter on the husband-wife relationship. Cicada is an insect and the females of the species are voiceless. So taking on the general complaint that wives speak too much and poor husbands have to bear their bickering, the characteristic of cicada is presented in a way that tickles the funny bone.

How can there be an India without leopards and tigers.

This statement mentions that jungles and tigers and leopards living in them are an integral part of Indian life and living. If this ecological arrangement is disturbed, it will shake the very foundation of geographical structure giving rise to pollution and water crisis. As mentioned “The tiger is the very soul of India, and when the last tiger has gone, so will the soul of the country” (244). The animal represents the valour of Indian people. Goddess Durga, a very revered deity has tiger as its vehicle. It is very important to preserve the existence of a tiger.

Nature will always have the last word.

This is what many Romantic poets have been reiterating that nature can never be over-powered. Hence mankind needs to respect its existence for its own survival.

Works Cited
