

## Short Stories of Ruskin Bond: A Visit to Natural Realism

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### Abstract

In today's world, where artificialities, pretensions, and hypocrisy abound, those desiring or on the look-out for original, true, and truthful parts of life will find a very restricted arena in which to do so. Talking about literature and the way it reflects contemporary issues, one can undoubtedly say that literary field and especially the writing of Ruskin Bond is full of representations of the world with natural Realism. In broad sense, Realism is a representation of objects and conditions in the way they appear to the senses as opposed to the ideal and the fanciful. Bond's selected short stories, analyzed in this research paper have a gleam of Realism that draws the reader closer to reality. Reading such stories with a strong sense of reality in today's fictitious time generates a sense of belonging and connection not just with the text but also with the author.

**Keywords:** Nature, Natural Realism, Belongingness, Intimacy.

### Introduction

This paper tries to trace the elements of Natural Realism in the works of Ruskin Bond. Now, let us examine the subject under the microscope. Our subject 'Natural Realism' means a way to portray something in a true, original and genuine sense without any touch of artificiality or factors constituting imaginative and superficial elements. To Ruskin Bond, it was an honest depiction of things, characters as they truly exist. As per the book 'New Standards Encyclopedia', "Realism as a movement became dominant in the western world in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Naturalism developed in the United States as an impact of the European movement of Realism"(87).

In 1857, the French author and art critic Champfleury, who edited the periodical *Le Realisme* in 1856 and 1857, was a great supporter of Realism in painting and Fiction. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Realism spread to the works of literature of nearly all nations. It focuses on the commonplace rather than the extraordinary, and on the present rather than the mythical past. The terms 'Realism' and 'Naturalism' are used more or less interchangeably. The French author and critic Emile Zola first expressed the theory of 'Naturalism' dealing in objective detail with sordidness and despair. The subject matter that is observed by human beings in its

true sense without distorted facts or rumours and then presented in its true form is called 'Realism'. When Realism is preceded by the word natural, it certainly means entering into the world of nature and obviously when nature is talked about by Ruskin Bond he refers to something divine in nature. In one of his stories, Bond has mentioned 'the healing pores nature has...' (35). Natural Realism means the reality of nature or nature in the real sense. Nature is enveloped with various creations like hills, rivers, trees, grass, sky, clouds, beautiful birds, butterflies, animals, sand, soil etc. The natural elements as observed and perceived by human beings in their exact form with no exaggeration are taken to be as natural Realism. In the same manner Ruskin Bond attempts to depict the reality of nature honestly in his works.

Now, if we scan 'Naturalism', it began as a branch of literary Realism, and Realism portrays the facts and logic with no signs of imagination and artificial factors. When the mundane, ugly, pessimistic and dark aspects of life are also depicted as they are along with the brighter facets of life, it is, termed Realism and when it is done in relation to nature, it is known as 'Natural Realism'. The paradox of naturalism is that it embraces two opposing or conflicting viewpoints: human behaviour is dictated by natural principles while yet being the outcome of free-will. Realism may also be defined as the tendency to view or represent things as they are. Bond's Realism is thus the depiction of actual or real, setting aside abstract and speculative things.

"It is a manner of treating subject matter that presents a careful description of everyday life, usually of the lower and middle classes." (23)

A theory of writing in which the ordinary, familiar or mundane aspects of life are represented in a straightforward or matter of fact manner that is presumed to reflect life as it actually is.

### **Premises of the Paper**

Ruskin Bond's writing abounds in the love of nature; it's binding with humans, deep concern and interest for trees, mountains, birds, flowers and insects. This paper aims at analyzing his contribution of natural Realism in his selected short stories from his books *A Bond with the Mountains* and *Roads to Mussoorie*. No doubt, Bond is considered an eminent writer in focusing on the natural world of trees, mountains and other beautiful creations of nature.

### **Review of Literature**

V.Iyappan, in his paper "The Denizens and Inseparable relationship of Nature in the works of Ruskin Bond", has mentioned the real and natural description of nature. His words, "The natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Mussoorie almost invariably form the setting of his works and reflect his ardent faith in the healing power of nature." (184)

William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" has given these words which are a reality in today's world. He says that we are violating the laws of nature, and the retribution from the biosphere will be more terrible than away inflicted on humans by Gods. Amrapali Chawla in his paper has written "Literature well known for reflecting the contemporary issues could not have remained unaffected from this theme."(1)

### **Text and the Author**

Bond expresses deep concern for nature and its vital importance in our life. In most of his short-stories, he has depicted the reality of natural world as observed and seen by naked eyes. He has presented the true and real picture of surroundings, environment and the beautiful colors of nature. Bond's description of nature is natural as well as realistic. He has not only portrayed the beautiful aspects of nature but also the direful aspect which one can discern throughout his writing.

No doubt, Bond has dealt magnificently with the smooth, serene, wonderful and healing aspects of nature but in the stories the rough, abrupt and violent aspect of nature are also dealt with. This shows that Bond has not stepped back from showing the true and real picture of nature no matter how ugly or awkward it is.

Bond has shown the destructive forces of nature in the story *Angry River*, *Earthquake* and *Flames in the Forest*. In the story *The Angry River*, Bond has given a portrayal of a village girl 'Sita' coping with calamity-the destruction caused by a flood. Bond is a prolific writer who has created a niche in presenting the realistic picture of nature as everyday life activities. His short-stories are written with a clear vision, an eye for observing the original and avoiding superfluties.

### **Nostalgia and Memories in the Works of Bond**

His book *Roads to Mussoorie* is a collection of stories with a realistic portrayal of nature as observed and witnessed by Bond for over 40 years. Stories paint the framework of journey from and to Mussoorie. Mussoorie has been a land of nostalgia and memories of beautiful past but Bond has not kept him 'off' from revealing the realities and also hardships of being an inhabitant of Mussoorie. In the story *Forward*, Bond has written, "Living in Mussoorie hasn't always been fun and games. It was a struggle to make both ends meet. There were periods of ill health."(122)

The stories are poignant and truly as an epoch to Ruskin Bond. The book has a collection of stories with closely observed details on matters written with an original touch that makes reader have a real feel and brings forth the actual scene in the forefront without an

effort of imagining or adding superficial elements to it. In the same story *Forward*, Bond has penned bright memories full of Realism.

### **Ruskin Bond's Style**

On one hand, he says that he has beautiful reminiscence in the hills of Mussoorie and on the other hand he has accepted the fact that it's a long hard winter in the hills. He has also written that scarlet blossoms bring new life to the drab winter hillside. In the story *Party Time in Mussoorie*, he has painted a realistic picture of the pleasure one can derive from the various aspects of nature like-“taking in the perfume of a rose or getting up at dawn to watch the morning sky and then the sunrise, or listening to the bird song-it does seem rather pointless having to depend on artificial stimulants for relaxation”(119)

Bond has that innate ability to draw his readers close to reality by making them aware of the beautiful facts/truths hidden in the lap of nature which at times we humans tend to ignore or overlook in the pursuit of materialistic rush.

In his writings we come across his love and appreciation not only for trees but also for animals specially the mention of leopards and tigers in an elegant way.

### **Eco-criticism in Realism of Bond**

In his story *Running for Lover*, he has given us a factual statement that no matter how fantastic it is to look at tigers but they are actually a real threat to travelers or anyone who ventured far from their town or village. He has also mentioned in this story that tribal mostly fell victim to man-eating tigers even though armed with bows and arrows which sometimes prove futile when this wild beast attack.

Bond's another story *Trees by My Window* pictures the natural beauties of various trees with which Bond is greatly attached. Bond has titled trees as “guardian of my conscience...”(45). Trees are the source of inspiration to him and at times he is awestruck by the features each different tree holds. In this story, his words: “The spring flowers of the horse chestnut look like Candleabra, and when the blossom fall, they carpet the hillside with their pale pink petals.”(63)

Bond has mentioned the other trees as well like Deodars and Oak. He has given the readers the true characteristics of Deodar which is erect and dignified and does not bend with the wind. Also, he speaks about an awe-inspiring walk in a Deodar forest. Deodars are named as “great sentinels of the mountains”(34) by Bond. Not only has he given a beautiful picture of trees he has also not hidden the truth that the branches of oak when twisted give it a very shaggy and undistinguished look.

Bond's deep intimacy with trees is reflected by his last lines in the story:

"These great trees of the mountains, I feel they know me well as I watch them and listen to their secrets, happy to rest my head beneath their outstretched arms."(65)

In the story *At the end of the Road*, a realistic description of the various towns is made. One of them 'Najibabad' is referred as the least inspiring places. Bond is truthful in giving us the real picture of this place as a very hot, dusty and apparently lifeless. He has also not held back about one of the areas called 'Hathipaon', when school children cover nearly Ten miles every day on their way to and from their school.

The story *The Kipling Road* speaks about the lethargic attitude of human beings who are so immersed in the materialism of today's world and involved in the technological run that they've almost forgotten to walk or realize the pleasure of walking.

His words form the indirect appeal made by Bond to concentrate on walking and minimize the use of motor vehicles to some extent. In the same story, Bond has pictures the four seasons in relation to one of the gardens depicting the grasp of flowers for various reasons. "In spring and summer, the garden flourished with ushering Poppies, Petunia, Phlox Larkspur, Calendula, Snapdragons and off course the English flowers". (31)

The other wonderful collection of stories *A bond with the Mountains* shows his deep love for nature and the display of reverence he has for the mighty mountains that he has named one of his stories as Mother Hill.

In this story, Bond has displayed his immense attachment with the mountains and goes on to present the everlasting existence of mountains. Readers are drawn so closely with nature when he defrosts them with the reality of mountains as permanent things.

When his lines are read, a stark reality is portrayed that we would not survive forever but mountains would remain forever. The other realistic aspect of the selfishness of human nature is touched in the same story when Bond mentions that due to excessive cutting of trees green places have dwindled and disappeared. Bond has tried to bring the reality to the reader that the consequence is going to be fatal if trees are not saved. He has shown his appeal through these lines, "it is not too late to save the little that is left". (52)

Natural Realism is reflected when he compares the hill to a mother by these lines- "For living in the hills was like living in the bosom of a strong, sometimes proud, but always a comforting mother".(54)

In the story *My Tall Green Friends* he has given a realistic portrayal of an old woman about 60 years in age climbing a walnut tree trying to grab as many Walnuts as she could. Bond is quite taken up by her age that in spite of her age, her arms and legs were sturdy. He writes about a woman who appears as a cat to him “.....as swift as a cat ...”(58)

Bond has mentioned about her wrinkled face and given the reader a quick thought about the reality of the process of ageing and its signs on one's body. The other important aspect of Realism touched by Bond in this story is the fact that humans are never predictable and they change with their environment. Referring to the deodar tree, he has written, “Trees like humans change with their environment”. (61)

The story *Tenacity of Mountainwater* speaks of the realistic appearance of the grass on the hills. His lines give us a natural vision of the green grass and the Himalayas. Bond has captured the action of the flowing river and the tenacity of its water in such a realistic way that the reader is able to visualize the real course of the river. He describes the movement of a river in a pictorial way, the reader feels as if they are watching a picture gallery.

The story *A Mountain Stream* gives an original and real vision of a forest with the various species of distinguished trees. Bond has described forest in the following lines:

“A forest of Oak and Maple and Himalayan Rhodendron...a path twists its way down through the trees, over an open ridge where red sorrel grows wild, and then down steeply through a tangle of thorn bushes, creepers and rangal bamboo”.(45)

Bond has beautifully spoken about the meandering river moving over pebbles, on a grassy verge, from rocks to the plains surrounded by wild roses. Normally rains are quite pleasant, emanating the smell of memories and wet sand and with it ushers the greenery, but Ruskin has also brought before us the other side of the picture of the rain which is a little bitter. His words:

“During the rains, the stream became a rushing torrent, bushes and small trees were swept away and the friendly murmur of the water became a threatening boom.”(48)

Walking through a forest is undoubtedly a breathtaking experience with the shades of the dense, erect guardians accompanying you and also the melodious chirping of birds breaking the eerie silence. This ‘Natural Realism’ of being in the forest with a soft steady walk is expressed by Bond in these words:

“Tramping through the forest to feast my eyes on the foliage that sprang up in tropical profusion—soft, springy mass; great stag, ferns on the trunks of trees; mysterious and

sometimes evil-looking lilies and orchids, wild dahlias, and the climbing convolvulus opening its purple secrets to the morning sun".(48)

At times, Bond is seen expressing his thankfulness and gratitude to God for these real sources of pleasures of nature away from a superficial touch.

In *A Mountain Stream* Bond has written "I would thank my god for leaves and grass, and the smell of things-the smell of mint and the touch of things-the touch of grass and air and sky, the touch of sky's blueness."(48)

*No Room for a Leopard* focuses on a few of the facts which we sometimes overlook. Birds and animals definitely develop an intimacy and attachment with humans if we attend them regularly. They are said to never harm us, if we remain cool, calm and composed with them. Bond has written "Birds and animals soon grew accustomed to my face or possibly they recognize my footsteps. The Langurs in the oak and Rhodendron trees, who would at first go leaping through the branches at my approach, now watched me with some curiosity."(18)

One of the stark and harsh realities of life is that 'humans are selfish and greedy', who extensively use nature to meet their selfish ends is visible all around. The relentless cutting of trees and the dreaded consequence that follow in the form of extinction of wild species like Leopard and other members of the Cat family fail to act as a deterrent.

Deforestation and its affect on the destruction of the habitat of wild animals is clearly visible in the story of Bond. In the story, *No Room for a Leopard* a mention is done of the cruel 'hunters' who are on the lookout for a leopard as its skin is going to fetch them a huge amount. Bond's 'Shikaris' are aware of the fact that there was a ban on the export of its skin but they know how to handle the matter through unfair means. Bond has expressed his uneasiness on this reckless behaviour of the 'Shikaris'. He has concluded his story with the words "there was no room in the world for a mountain lion."(24)

The very line shows that humans have proved dangerous for the very existence of these beauties of the jungle. In the story *A New Flower* one of the realities is projected by Bond that no matter how engulfed we are in admiring the nature, there are otherworldly worries too. In this story, a character Usha, a Nine-year-old school going girl is overwhelmed by a butter-yellow flower and she shows that to Bond. Both of them have great concern for the flower but in due time the otherworldly matters occupied their thoughts and both of them forgets about the flower. His lines, "There were lessons and exams for her to worry about and rent and electricity bills to occupy a freelance writer's thoughts."(7)

## Conclusion

The world of literature throngs with works dealing with the beauty and power of nature. There are many theories but all boil down to the fact that Bond's writings are full of logic and portray the realities of life. In his words-"Problem of deforestation and pollution of environment and decay of wildlife have been the subjects of my stories and essays. In this way, I have touched social problems."(5)

This paper traced both the man and the writer that was Ruskin Bond. His true self shines through in his naive characters. He never invents a theme from the real world, but he is a realist who lives in the real world and shares society's common opinions and tendencies with others. He discovers themes in his daily life and among the ordinary individuals he encounters. He adores the presence of children and the elderly. Therefore, it can be concluded that Bond's writing, whether it is fiction or poetry or thoughts expressed in his prose writings, is rich in Realism of the highest order. Nature plays a dominant part in Bond's fiction with a realistic portrayal of his dwelling place. The innate love of nature and the unfair attitude of humans towards nature and the resultant dire consequences that emerges due to the ruthless action of man is pictured in the true sense in his stories. He has mentioned the greediness of humans in killing the tigers and trying to procure a big sum of money. Bond's writing infused with a feature of Realism not only inculcates in humans the responsibilities and awareness towards nature in general but also contributes largely in directing the mind of readers in becoming loyal, selfless and honest. Since, time immemorial, writers have contributed a lot to the reader folk in giving their best about nature and landscape but this is the indisputable fact that natural description when read with a hue of Realism definitely establishes a sense of craving in readers to believe in logic, facts, truth and goes a long way in building a rationale mind also in creating a realistic approach towards life in general.

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