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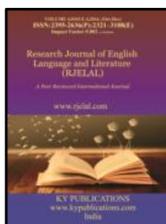
RUSKIN BOND'S *AN ISLAND OF TREES*: NEED TO NURTURE NATURE

S.PRIYA

Assistant professor

Department of English, Nirmala College For Women, Red fields, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Mail – priyaoctober@rediffmail.com



ABSTRACT

Nature always seems to be friendly to us leaving a feeling of warmth and security in the heart of the readers. The humans' dependent on nature for their survival and the healing powers of nature on humans show the need for serious ecological concerns in today's literature since nature is in destruction. This questions our responsibility towards the planet when we read literature and also gives rise to the answer that literature has to be seen within an ecological vision. Ruskin Bond, a true son of the Indian soil, exploring the relationship between man and denizens of nature in his stories, comes under the influence of various ecological concerns. Ruskin Bond's proclamation of robbing nature's wealth by humans is the need of the hour. This paper makes a study of Ruskin Bond's short story *An Island of Trees* through which the need of the people to nurture nature for the survival of the living world is analyzed.

Key words: concern, ecological, island, nature, trees

The spirit of the tree became my friend,
Took me to his silent throbbing heart
And taught me the value of stillness
My first tutor, friend of the lonely.

The oft-quoted dictum of Wordsworth about Nature being his 'friend, philosopher and guide', became a real life experience for Ruskin Bond, for the tree in the verse is an archetype and it represents all trees in general (Prasad 245). Bond's various writings make one realizes that all trees and plants, mountains and valleys, rain drops and streams are not only the source of life but the preserver of life as well.

Ruskin Bond (b.1934) has been an accomplished Indian English writer of British descent. Bond is a Sahitya Academy Award Winner for his book, *Our Trees still Grow in Dehra* (1992) and is also honoured with the prestigious Padmashree (1999) for his lifetime contribution to Indian English Literature. He has written short

stories, novels, poems, essays, travelogues and many other things. When Bond started writing short stories, his mind was preoccupied by the nostalgic rustic life in the hilly areas and also the rustic people who he came in touch with when he stayed during his early age. His memories get reflected in almost all his works with the charm of the country side and the rustic environment with a lot of philosophical description touching the reader's heart. Bond's characters are also drawn from the society of people who lives in close association with Mother Nature. He earnestly pleads to save the green layer of earth through his works and in which the relationship between man and tree is clearly revealed through the ancient belief, 'A blessing rests on the house where falls the shadow of the tree'. The correlation of man and tree gives the essence of Ruskin Bond's treatment of nature:

The writers have approached nature according to their mental make – up and

the life around them. Some fall in love with her external beauty, whereas some are keen to learn from one impulse of vernal wood. Very few like Bond delight in running with the flowers and conversing with the trees. (Fiction 42)

To Bond, Nature is the only life giving force. He believes that one who is filled with love for nature can live in total harmony since nature always shows her bounty of love and care alike for all weak and strong, rich and poor. Trees, which are the symbol of the perennial source of life hold major concern of Ruskin Bond: If people keep cutting trees... there'll soon be no forests left at all, and, the world will be just one vast desert (Bond 145).

Ruskin Bond in his number of stories warns mankind against urbanization and deforestation which is a kind of violence to nature:

In some of his stories he makes a dig at the unwise decision of the authorities to cut trees and build roads and buildings in their place. What pains him more is our lack of understanding of the importance of the trees to maintain ecological balance. (Das 108)

Bond feels a heavy pain in his heart when he thinks of human life without trees since nature is under threat. He points out that man has caused ecological imbalance which in turn will harm mankind spelling disaster someday. Also Bond shows a great path for the betterment of mankind by going green in his stories insisting on the need to grow trees everywhere: The thought of a world without trees became a sort of nightmare for me. It's one reason why I shall never want to live on a treeless moon! (Island 58). Ruskin Bond's *An Island of Trees* is a beautiful example for this kind of attitude in which he pictures the island full of trees.

In *An Island of Trees*, Ruskin Bond insists on the need to plant more trees to make this earth survive through the characters of Koki, a girl of ten and her Grandmother. Through the use of plain and simple language, Ruskin Bond makes it easier for everyone to take home the valid points of making our environment green. The story opens with Koki and her grandmother talking about her great grandfather who had abundant love for plants and

trees. Koki's grandmother describes how her great grandfather feels life in each and every plant and also about the reciprocal love they had towards each other: Sometimes when I sat alone beneath a tree I would feel a little lonely or lost. But as soon as my father joined me, the garden would become a happy place, the tree itself more friendly (Island 54). Being in perfect harmony with nature, Bond abounds in goodly emotions and feelings which are perceptible in almost all the characters he has drawn. This emotion and feeling towards nature is very well expressed through the words of Great grandfather of Koki who always goes on planting trees wherever finds bare: We are planting it for the earth and for the birds and animals who live on it and need more food and shelter (Island 58).

Ruskin Bond feels heart broken when he witness people destroying the world of trees and animals everywhere. Bond believes and makes us believe that nature is the pure bubbling life force responsible for the birth and death of mankind and his thoughts are obviously given life in Koki's grandmother's words:

Father told me why mankind, and not only wild creatures, need trees – for keeping the desert away, for attracting rain, for preventing the banks of rivers from being washed away. But everywhere people are cutting down trees without planting new ones. If this continues, then one day there will be no forests at all and the world will become one great desert! (Island 58)

The story brightens our minds and eyes when the great grandfather plants trees in the desert in a promising note that someday the trees will enliven us. This unconditional act is rewarded after some years when Koki's grandmother walks along the river bed and the emotional bonding between nature and mankind is pictured in the story through Bond's words:

I remember, and as I looked across the dry river bed, my eye was immediately caught by the spectacular red plumes of the coral blossom. In contrast with the dry river bed, the island was a small green paradise. When I walked over to the trees, I noticed that a number of parrots had come to live

in them. A small spotted deer scampered away to hide in a thicket. And a wild pheasant challenged me with a mellow 'who – are – you, who – are – you?'. (Island 61)

Ruskin Bond's life at woods in early age has built up a strong emotional bond between him and nature which urge him to take necessary steps to safeguard nature: Like Robert frost he stands in front of the woods dark and deep, but unlike him he enters them and discovers the very soul of the woods, which in turn transformed him into a visionary (Shaw 102). Being a visionary, Bond recognizes the need for ecological balance and calls to turn towards the essential need of the hour i.e. recognizing human-nature interdependence: The destruction of forest means death of flora and fauna, and finally death of man. Destroying the ecological balance kills all forms of life (Shaw 103). When man shows no mercy towards nature then someday nature will show no mercy at all leading to a complete disaster insists Bond. It is in the hands of mankind to preserve or spoil earth and hence it is the duty of every individual to cherish and nurture the life giving force for the future generations and with a positive note Ruskin Bond concludes *An Island of Trees*: The trees had multiplied! The forest was on the move! In one small corner of the world, my father's dream was coming true, and trees were walking again! (Island 61). As Bond dreams let's all join hands together to save this precious earth.

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