



# Identifying Biophilia in the Select Poems of Ruskin Bond's *Book of Verse*

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Nature is coalescence of finding one's self and redefining one's space in the world where all living beings co-exist. Nature has also become part and parcel of Ruskin Bond's notable works which include his first novel titled *The Room on the Roof*. He is a prominent writer for children in Indian writing in English whose works represent the aura of everyday life. Ruskin Bond's *Book of Verse* is a poetry collection comprising of more than five sub-divisions which deal with love, nature, humour, travel and childhood reminiscences. In the section titled 'Nature', Ruskin Bond shares universal as well as individual experiences which are in total reciprocation with nature. This research article sets out to analyse the selected poems from the perspective of biophilia.

Indian English literature is otherwise known as Indian Writing in English and more frequently referred to as Indo -Anglian Literature because of its emergence during British colonial rule in India. It is the body of writing written by native people in English whose mother tongue is completely different and it is also a part of the numerous languages in India. Indian Writing in English commenced with the writings of the works of Louis Vivian Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt followed by Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. These writers have vividly captured the presence of environment and culture in their writings. It gained its popularity and growth in fiction through the notable works of R. K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. It also carries diasporic elements and postcolonial aspects which mark the significance of its universal appeal. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has become a repertoire of wide variety of themes and ideologies especially aftermath of postcolonialism.

Indian writers have contributed to the growth and development of many genres that comprise of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, memoirs, short story collections and so on. Twentieth century poetry in English written by Indian writers has exposed the new twist and turns that the Indo-Anglian Literature is heading towards. Writers like Dilip Chitre, Kamala Das, Nizzim Ezekiel, Shiv K. Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra have dealt with themes which attempt to break away from the sentimentality and to move towards reality. Kamala Das 's poem "An Introduction" stands as a good example for confessional poetry which is actually a western poetic style of writers like Sylvia Plath, Maya Angelou and so on. At the outset, Indian writing in English exudes a variety of themes ranging from social, cultural, conservative values to multifarious issues like freedom struggle, patriotism and contemporary modern issues.

Indian Writing in English exhibits the concern for nature and environment in one or the other way, commencing from the older poets to the contemporary novelist like Amitav Ghosh. Ecocriticism advocates the human beings to have a biocentric view about the significance of nature and the unavoidability of it in the life of any living being on Earth. One peculiar example of this aspect can be seen in the poems of Toru Dutt. She is very consciousness of protecting human -nature relationship which gets its quintessential aspects in the poems like "Our Casuarina Tree", "The Lotus", etc., Contemporary Indian writing in English also addresses issues pertaining to nature and environment which are the need of the hour.

Ruskin Bond is a renowned novelist known for his realistic setting and remarkable characters which he has created in his novels and stories. He was born in Himachal Pradesh and grew up in many places like New Delhi, Simla and Jamnagar. These places have become the setting of most of his novellas and novels. He spent four years in Channel Islands as well as in London. He came back to India in 1955. He has received many awards for his pivotal contribution to children's literature. His first novel *The Room on the Roof* has earned him John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial prize in 1957. He has authored more the five hundred collections of stories and articles which have appeared in magazines and anthologies. He has received awards like the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993, the Padma Shri in 1999 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014. His poetry collections include *Book of Verse* and *Rains in the mountain* got their publication in 2016.

Ruskin Bond's *Book of Verse* is a poetry collection consisting of more than five divisions which are titled as "Love", "Nature", "Humour", "Travel", "Childhood" and other Haiku poems. In the Introduction chapter of the book, Ruskin Bond has shared the emotional connection which he had with his first novel where Kishen calls Rusty as a poet. In the section titled "Nature", there are more than twenty poems which elucidates upon the mindscape of the poet as well as the landscape. All these poems are very price with maximum of ten to fifteen line each and they are addressed to nature and its living beings. The poet also deals with the commonality that he identifies with the living beings along with their state of the minds. He titled all the poems in such a way that the title itself sums up the idea which is yet to be read by the readers. "Raindrop", "Lone Fox Dancing", "The Bat" and all other titles carry symbolic meaning that manifest the pathetic fallacy embedded in the poems.

Biophilia is otherwise known as biophilia hypothesis which suggests the aspect of human's innate tendency to seek connection with nature. The word biophilia originates from the Greek , 'philia' means 'love'. This term is first introduced by Edward O. Wilson in his book *Biophilia* published in 1984. It is first used by Erich Fromm to describe the psychological orientation of being attached to all that is alive. The origin of hypothesis can be traced to Aristotle's concept of "love of life". It forms a part of evolutionary psychology. This hypothesis puts forth how people deliberately want and wish to redeem themselves by finding solace in nature and even to gravitate and identify themselves as a part and parcel of nature. Even in Linguistics, there are many examples of how nature becomes the mother of communication for the speech activity development in children. This biophilic concept is multidisciplinary because it serves as a healing therapy in any forms supporting the betterment of patients in the field of medicine. Many psychologists recommend pet animals and travel voyages to recover from all ailments. Biophilia in literature is employed in the narrative of the ecogothic novel titled *Perdita* by Hilary Scharper, a Canadian writer.

In the poem "Raindrop", Ruskin Bond summarises the idea of evolution and presence of God by using raindrop as a metaphor. He points out that the leaf is only a part of the tree even though it is complete on its own. Even the tree becomes part of the mountain. He highlights the connections that are created in the world and also talks about the ultimate saturation point of all living beings in the hands of God. The mountain also dissolves into the sea. Yet the sea remains like a raindrop on the hands of God. Likewise, Human beings commencing from their birth till death, they also resemble a raindrop on the hands of God.

And the sea, so complete in itself,

Rests like a raindrop

On the hand of God. (Lines 6-9)

Here, the poet is talking about the love of life and the interconnections that both nature and human beings resolve and dissolve in the hands of God.

“Lone Fox Dancing”, Ruskin Bond identifies himself with the lone fox which he saw, was dancing in the moonlight. He sees the joy of the fox because he feels that it is the right time especially, the cold moonlight is suitable for the fox to wander and howl in happiness to express the bottled-up emotions. He also views the situation which is in close resemblance to his life. He also points out that if the truth is echoed in words, he will also be as joy as the fox But, he will cherish it in the morning dew. The idea of biophilia is very much revealed in this poem vividly to show how the poet gravitate towards nature and finding redemption.

Sometimes, when words ring true,

I’m like alone fox dancing

In the morning dew. (Lines 7- 9)

“So Beautiful the Night” delineates the concept of day and night in the life of a human being and other natural creatures. Ruskin Bond says that he loves night and also, he shows his observation of things and incidents happening around him. He puts forth the significance of night in the life of all small creatures. He sympathizes with the natural creatures like porcupines coming out for roots, peeping owl out of the trunk, crawling insects, trees stretching arms to talk with the moon as they are very busy in the night time. He also observes and thinks in supernatural way like trees walking and marching over the moonlight mountains. He finds his busy day with the busy night that all other creatures indulging in various activities. He does not disturb any of them instead he glances everything through his window. This showcases the universal participation of all creatures at a moment.

“The Bat” is a quintessential poem of exhibiting Biophilia distinctly. Because in this poem, Bond describes about a bat that flies low comparing to the common reachable heights of all bats. He demarcates minute differences he sees in this bat as it flies in through the door than the window. He is very much surprised to see differences in bats and other creatures. The poet wonders about the activities of the bat by questioning whether his radar is not working properly, or he just prefers to follow his own path. Because he even calls the bat by giving a gender called “he”. He compares this state of bat to his own life when he has grown up in the same way of being different and following a unique way.

On lonely nights, even a crazy bat

Is my company. (Lines 19-20)

In most of his poems titled “Rain in the Hills”, “Silent Birth”, “Listen!”, Ruskin Bond shares his loneliness with nature. It is one of the commonest archetypes that encompasses all his novels particularly, in the novel *Rusty Runs Away*, Rusty finds the companions in the banyan tree near his house. He breaks away from loneliness by seeking relief in nature and natural world that’s why he aims to be the botanist in the beginning of the novel. He explains the hushed silence which is both physical and psychological, emptiness, longingness by comparing to the state of leaves, lemons, roof and the mist in the aftermath of heavy downpour. Because the entire house looked like a dark caress which symbolizes death and silence in forever. He ends the poem “Rain in the Hills” by stating that all the trees look dull and grey which embodies danger by sharing the loneliness with the poet.

The immediate desire to search for a companion in nature sums up the core aspect of biophilia. In the poem, “Firefly in My Room”, the poet dialogues about a firefly which came in through the window thereby lighting up every little space in the room in the night. The poet feels that the firefly is a friendly presence for him by quoting that it dispels the gloomy day. The poet closes the poem with an anticipation of the arrival of firefly once again as a companion to him.

And after it had gone, I left

The Window open, just in case

It should return. (Lines 11- 13)

Ruskin Bond wishes to eliminate the fear of owls among human beings by quoting that the owls also has given him a friendly presence than any risk or danger. He compares owl's hooting to men's shouting to substantiate the rights of both. He even personifies owl as forest's sentinel who protects the entire world at night. But owls have negative connotation in mythology as well as history. So, the poet highlights that the owl is not threatening or casting spells on anyone at midnight. Instead, he pinpoints that owl is in tears and it says to the world that all is well.

Rather, it seems to cry,

The night is good- all's well, all's well.

Biophilia is dealing with the connection between man and nature. It also forms a part of psychology.

In all his poems, Ruskin Bond shares the inevitable harmony that human beings wish to create with nature. As mother nature is very benevolent, human beings should protect nature which also signifies the importance of biophilia hypothesis. Ruskin Bond has brought out the essence of companionship of both nature and human beings in his poetry collection *Book of Verse*.

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