

Omnipotence of Place in Ruskin bond's "My Father's Trees in Dehra" and "The Rain in the Mountains"**Nathiya. M 1, Dr. V. Rema 2**

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Abstract

In this post-modern world of place lessness and nonplace, Ruskin Bond's stories are marked with a sense of place and place attachment. His characters are permanently rooted in their place. They have a deep attachment to their physical environment. Physical features of the place are deeply regarded and loved by his characters. Being products of the place, they are constantly in touch with rivers, mountains, animals, plants and soils. The place and environment are fundamental aspects of people's lives. They shape their personality. Bond's upbringing and subsequent settlement in the Garhwal region have a deep impact on his personality. This impact of place can be traced through in his writings. Place plays a critical role in creating the identity of a person. The identity of the Himalayan people is deeply related to their landscape and the environment. Bond's short stories describe the connection of Garhwali people to their place. Their physical features, culture, religion and food habits are an integral part of the place. His stories find out the relationship of humans to their physical environment.

Keywords: Place, Environment, People, Landscape etc.

The word Place ' , has several connotations as it refers to a site, locale, region, town, city, area or a country. In cultural geography, the place is more than an area, a point or position in space. Scholars and critics have given several connotations of place. In International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography, T. Cresswell says that —space becomes a place when it is used and lived. Experience is at the heart of what place means(Cresswell 170). People are an integral part of a place along with plants, animals and physical features. It is a combination of physical features such as rivers, mountains, forests, water bodies as well as cultural artefacts such as buildings, agricultural fields, and roads. Along with these material things, place also has immaterial associations like feelings and memories. Since the 1970s, the place has been conceptualized as a particular location that has acquired a set of meanings and attachments. (Cresswell 169)

Place plays a very vital role in psychological and social development. In places 'people find meanings and identity as they have personal and social attachments, they form a strong social and emotional bond. The traditional way of life was rooted and attached to a particular place with a deep sense of place. People get a sense of place from the meaningful experiences of the place. A person may have a positive or negative experience of a place. Many people like the hustle and bustle of cities, concrete buildings and pavements. On the other hand, other people like to walk in a place surrounded by greenery and trees. They love to walk on the banks of brooks and streams. All these things depend on the experiences of the individuals. A city person may have a negative experience of the surroundings and may long to return to nature or s/he may have a positive experience and like to stay in the city.

Ruskin Bond deliberately has settled in Garhwal region because of his upbringing in this beautiful and serene environment away from the humdrum of modern megacities. The effect of early childhood and afterwards his settlement in the Himalayas is immensely reflected in his writings. After independence like most of the Anglo-Indians he went to England, when he settled down there, he felt alienated and longed for the Himalayas. Jim Corbett, the great Himalayan hunter and writer also could not get rid of the memories of Himalayas despite his settlement in Africa. Bond describes his longing for India in these words:

It was while I was living in England, in the jostle and drizzle of London, that I remembered the Himalayas at their most vivid. I had grown up amongst those great blue and brown mountains; they had nourished my blood; and though I was separated from them by thousands of miles of ocean, plain and desert, I could not rid them from my system. It is always the same with the mountains. Once you have lived with them for any length of time, you belong to them. There is no escape. (Rain in the Mountains 92)

Like Bond, his protagonist, Rusty chooses to live in hilly regions of Garhwal in India. Bond's stories depict many Anglo-Indians staying back in Himalayan cities such as Dehra and Shimla and Mussoorie. In "Prospect of Flowers" Miss Mechanize lived in her Himalayan house without any intention of leaving it and going to England. After coming to India Bond could not afford to settle in Delhi because of the deep sense of belonging to the Himalayas. There he longed for the motherly comfort of Himalayas and he realised that he truly belonged to the Himalayas. In —The Leopard he says:

I had lived in cities too long and had returned to the hills to renew myself, both physically and mentally. Once you have lived with mountains with any length of time, you belong to them and must return again and again. (Panther's Moon and Other Stories 62)

Bond thinks that mountains are the best place to stay. He claims that the people who spend time in the Himalayas will long for them forever. Mountains elevate the spirit and mind of the people. Bond considers mountain as a strong mother who looks after her children very carefully. Ruskin Bond emphasises the inclusion of mountains in literary tradition. He claims that just a few great writers have written about mountains. Describing the need of the mountains in the literary tradition, Ruskin Bond says:

The sea has been celebrated by many great writers- Conrad, Melville, Stevenson, Masfield- but I cannot think of anyone comparable for whom the mountains have been a recurring theme. I must turn to the Taoist poets from old China to find a true feeling for mountains. Kipling does occasionally look to the hills, but the Himalayas do not appear to have given rise to any memorable Indian literature, at least not in modern times. (Rain in the Mountains 198)

The Himalayas for Ruskin Bond is the same as Lake District for Wordsworth. Many collections of Bond focus on the Himalayas, Rain in the Mountains, Ganga Descends, and Himalayan Tales show his love for the mountains. We find the vivid portrayal of villages and village people, students coming and going to the school, crossing hills and forests; and people sitting around the fire telling stories. Plants, animals, rivers, mountains, pools find their ways with all beauty and diversity on the pages of his short stories. These selections of beautiful short stories describe the Himalayan region with all its freshness.

He has good romantic sense for nature which is revealed in his writings cannot be denied. He has vividly depicted the environmental issues through the natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Mussoorie as he has seen and experienced them from very close. In his short story "My Father's Trees in Dehra", Bond has talked about his absorption for a small rocky Island which was fully covered by different beautiful plants situated in the middle of a dry river-bed in Mussoorie. The dry river-bed "...was one of those river-beds, so common in the foot-hills, which [were] completely dry in the summer but flooded during the monsoon rains" (Bond 45). Due to such off-putting seasonal effect, the grass remained short in size and brown in colour, while Sal trees appeared emaciated in shape particularly in summer season. The grass, despite such insalubrious appearance, was being grazed by the skinny cattle at the edge of the jungle.

Ruskin Bond who used to visit the island regularly with his father in his childhood had assisted him with great enthusiasm in his tree-planting like tamarinds, laburnum, and coralsaplings plantations etc. They “spent the day planting them on the island, then ate [their] lunch there, in the shelter of a wild plum” (Bond 44). His main aim behind such activity was to maintain the ‘weighing scale’ of nature. In “My Father’s Trees in Dehra”, Bond has explored the beauty of nature.

“One impulse with a vernal wood, can teach you more of man.”- WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The story “My Father’s Trees in Dehra”, travels through the myth and mystery of Himalayas with its hallmark mountains and, streams and trees. The author narrates the story in fashion that the readers get to interact with the nature and people of Dehradun. When we consider Ruskin Bond as a pantheist, the nature, people and the locales become a religious truth. The old unspoilt hills of Musoorie come alive through his writing. The story enumerates the benefit of planting trees and being close to nature. The author says the English had an affinity with trees, and in the hills of Dehra they discovered a retreat, which reminded, in bits and pieces, them of England. He goes on to compare the yesteryear’s Dehra to his present visit to his ancestral bungalow.

He says the tangible aspects must have faded but the trees in his grandfather’s bungalow were still standing tall which is evidence of the ephemeral being of nature. He lists out the kind of trees he sees on the way to the bungalow which still smells of Victorian snobbery because of the choice of plants in the neighbourhood. The houses, though, have changed quite a bit owing to the increasing crime and the dwindling trust in humanity at large. The ancestral house now belongs to a new owner and they have raised the boundary so that nobody can peak inside. The present owner, General Saigal, was not taking the care of the garden as it was looking unattended and unkempt. But one tree still remains the glory of the house which is the jackfruit tree, giving shade to the side verandah. Also this was the place where the author spent his lazy afternoons when he was a kid. This tree stored his life’s valuables like pocket knife, an Iron Cross (a relic of the First World War) and now the author feels an impulse to retrieve that treasure., but would the present owner understand the emotions behind such an act. He finds an old street vendor who was exhausted due to the weight of the supplies and starts chatting with him about his age and work. He then complains of old age and how once they are old, they are left to fend for themselves, just like the trees in the author’s ancestral bungalow, which were now left to their mercy with no one to take care of them.

Then the vendor says that he’s so old that he feels he has outlived even the trees and then the vivid imagination of the author starts visualizing him as a small bent tree wearing a black waist coat , a living scarecrow. He is the key between the lost memories of the bungalow and the author because he was there when the house was being constructed but he left soon after when the children of the house went off for their respective jobs. This made him remember his father who was a key piece in his love for nature. This chat reminded him of the long walks he would take with his father before the war happened and they had to leave this place for a long time. He was always happy amongst his trees and once saw a creeper reaching out for his father’s feet as though bowing in respect to the man who took utmost care of them. His life is eternalized with the trees that he planted in his lifetime. The author, now, is filled with doubts about the fate of the trees once the wrath of humans becomes fatal enough to eradicate them. But then he is reassured that the new plants are in safe haven when they have the shade of the trees planted by them. He ends the story by saying that these trees are multiplying and with this his father’s dreams of making this world a greener, happier and more peaceful place is coming true one tree a time. The eco critical emotions if kept intact in all of us then we can most definitely make this Earth a paradise for the generations to come.

The Himalayas find a unique place in the writings of Ruskin Bond. He describes the beauty and tranquillity of the serene region of the Garhwal. His stories explore the relationship of the people with their natural environment. Bond’s characters are deeply attached to the hilly region of the Himalayas. The place has a very deep impact on the characters. It has a very important influence on the formation of identity and creating a sense of belonging. The day-to-day life of people is dependent on the Himalayan environment. Their culture, food and lifestyle are influenced by the hills and valleys of the Himalayas.

In the modern world, humans are alienated from the natural environment. However, in Bond's writings, people's relationship to their environment is still strong. Bond himself has a deep relationship to the Garhwal region. He vividly describes the local place, people and culture in his short stories. He gives preference to the quiet and peaceful rural setting over the cacophonous urban lifestyle. He endorses the fact that urban environments have clusters of the natural environment. However, vast tentacles of property developers are eating them out. He is not against development, but against those thoughtless and unplanned developments in which nature finds a secondary place.

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