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# THE QUEST

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**A Bilingual Peer Reviewed  
Research Journal of  
Jorhat College Teachers' Unit**

**Editors**

**Dr. Diganta Kumar Phukan  
Mahfuja Begum**

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# Connecting Nature with Spirituality: An Assessment of Selected Nature Poems of Ruskin Bond

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## **Abstract:**

*Ruskin Bond, one of India's most celebrated writers writing in the English language, has built a special niche for himself in the literary landscape of the country with his peerless storytelling that essentially deals with the lives of common people from Himalayan villages or small north Indian towns. Although he is primarily known as a writer of short stories and fiction, he has also written poems on various subjects. The paper mainly aims to study the treatment of nature and spirituality in selected nature poems of Ruskin Bond and reflect upon the sentiments expressed in the poems viz, love, faith, resilience, self-respect, etc.*

**Keywords:** nature, spirituality

## **Introduction:**

When interviewer Shabir Hussain Mirza asked one of India's most celebrated writers in English – Ruskin Bond as

to what he liked to read and write about, the latter replied:  
“Well, I write a lot since I have been living here in the hills for many years. I write a lot about nature. I am very close to nature so I write about mountains and people who live in the hills of Himalaya. Most of my books are set in a small town like Dehradun, Mussoorie or a small village.” (Shabir Hussain Mirza and Ruskin Bond, 2004)

Readers having some familiarity with the works of Bond would be able to appreciate what the author said about the settings of his works. While the stories and novellas by Bond have definite locales, his poems do not have exact settings and are of a more general kind but they exude strong and positive sentiments for the natural world, elemental forces of nature, ordinary folks, wildflowers, animals, and even insects. Interestingly, Bond invariably tries to relate the sublimity in nature, his love for the often-overlooked wildflowers, and his empathy for the ordinary folks to an overarching spiritual presence which is the source and end of all eventualities.

Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh in 1934 and went to school at Shimla. His parents' unhappy marriage and breakup, his mother marrying again, the untimely death of his father, and the complex relationship with his stepfather – all affected his growth as a writer (Shabir Hussain Mirza and Ruskin Bond, 2004). That Bond did not limit himself by the bond of marriage but lived out his entire life on his principles with his adopted family in Mussoorie speaks about an unselfish and unconditional higher love that is not just limited to human relationships but something that extends

to everything in the world outside.

### **Objective of the paper:**

The objective of the paper is to attempt a close reading of Ruskin Bonds' selected nature poems and examine the treatment of nature and spirituality therein presented; the paper also reflects upon the sentiments expressed in the poems viz, love, faith, resilience, self-respect, independence, etc.

### **Discussion and Analyses:**

Away from the gaze of the multitude, the wildflowers in "Wild Flowers" ('The cowslip, the primrose, /the meadow sweet, the buttercup...') grow in isolated locations ('...in cool shady corners beneath rocks, near hidden springs'); the speaker in the poem declares that the world will be a dull place without wild flowers. The speaker highlights the sense of pride and self-respect that the wild flowers have – they are not carefully planted in well-maintained gardens and are not looked after by gardeners; resilient and careless in the wild, the wild flowers bloom in grandeur in nature and withstand the rains and the sun's heat with indifference. While the flowers in the garden get the due share of human attention, the wild flowers are often overlooked and or even destroyed with utter disregard ('... trampled underfoot/and crushed by bulldozers'). The speaker makes a promise that he will – unlike the rest – protect the wild flowers: 'I will pause in my walk/and step aside/rather than crush a daisy in the grass.' It is a celebration of self-respect and pride in one's independence – a trait that can be linked to Bond's personal growth as a writer – despite all the challenges and initial setbacks. The poem "The

Fern" is about the resilience of a simple maidenhair fern that survives all odds with patience and courage. The plant becomes the symbol of resilience, patience, humbleness, flexibility, and faith; in other words, the plant becomes the embodiment of qualities that one should imbibe to realize all human potential. The word 'slender' used in connection with the plant suggests a feminine quality – soft but not lacking in tensile strength; it clings onto the rock with all faith and thrives amidst the torrent of the gushing water. The picture of the rock-solid faith of the weak fern obliquely refers to the Catholic Christian faith which is established on the rock-solid faith of St Peter (Petrus – stone/rock in Latin). That Bond finds in the simple maiden hair fern the germ of faith and spirituality gives us a glimpse of his spiritual inclinations and a conspicuous mark of his Christian faith.

In "Flower Power" there is an attempt to establish, through the words of advice of the father to the son, the notion that with one's innate goodness, one can effortlessly attract good people to oneself – just as the flowers never fail to attract 'butterflies, bees, ladybirds/and gentle people' just by their colours, beauty, and fragrance and without any fuss. The poem ends with a realization and an assertion that the power of the flowers and good people are gifts from God.

In "Silence," the speaker thanks God for silence – the great silence of the mountains, deserts, and forests; he also appreciates the silence of 'the street/late at night/when the last travellers/ are safely home/and the traffic is still.' The silence is described in such terms that it becomes palpable. That solid silence is shattered by the equally palpable sound of 'a moth fluttering against the window pane, /the drip of

the dew running off the roof, /and a field mouse rustling through dry leaves.' The lines in "Listen!" have the structure of imperative sentences but function-wise these have the role of alerting and surprising the reader/listener to the usually overlooked happenings of the world which are taken for granted and hardly appreciated. While listening to the 'night wind in the trees,' 'summer grass,' 'dawn dew falling' is understandable, it is indeed peculiar how the speaker listens to 'the time that's tripping by,' 'the moon as it climbs the sky,' 'the mist in the trembling grass' and most interestingly 'silence calling;' the unusual and logic-defying collocations foreground the unique spiritual experiences and alerts the readers not to miss the common and the usual.

It is normal for people to judge and appreciate the world seen in the broad daylight; but in "So Beautiful is the Night" the speaker draws the readers' attention to the beauty of the night. The night comes as a solace for the hard-working folks – 'I love the night Lord. /After the sun's heat and the day's work, /it's good to close my eyes and rest my body.' The speaker is appreciative of the movements of the nocturnal animals at night – the porcupines, night – jars, owls, the numerous insects, and the night wind that 'comes down the chimney/and blows around the room.' Again, there is a sudden shift in the narrative voice, a return to the present moment – there is an urgency in tone: 'I'm watching the stars from my window. /The trees are stretching their arms in the dark/ and whispering to the moon.' The star-gazing speaker of the poem, mesmerized by the beauty of the night dives into a fantasy world where the rooted trees have become mobile and are marching in the moonlight: 'Armies of pine and firs and oaks/

Marching over the moonlight mountains.' This magical vision is for someone who is not caught in the business-like ways of the modern world; it is for a mind quietened in the company of nature, a mind that has the luxury to revel in the world of imagination without being troubled or infected by the restiveness of the multitude. There are so much of prayers and cravings for solitude, silence, and quietude in the majority of his meditative nature poems that it creates a sense of wonder in the readers as to why he needs what he needs. Quite interestingly, the speaker reveals in "A Quiet Mind" that the demand for silence and stillness is not for his joy alone but to serve humanity at large – 'Lord, give me a quiet mind, /That I might listen/ A gentle tone of voice/That I might comfort others...' The quietness is also necessary for the speaker so that he gets a sense of direction.

That there is joy in being alone is exemplified in the dance of the lone fox ("Lone Fox Dancing") in the 'cold moonlight.' The speaker silently witnesses the spectacle and finds in the lonesome act a divine inspiration and departs without disturbing it: 'I stood and watched; then/Took the low road, knowing/You'd given him the Night.' The solo dance of the fox becomes for the speaker the benchmark of pure joy and bliss: 'Sometimes when words ring true, /I'm like the lone fox dancing/In the morning dew.' At this point, it seems pertinent to draw a parallel between the experience of the speaker and the experience described in William Wordsworth's "Daffodils": 'For oft, when on my couch I lie/In vacant or in pensive mood, /They flash upon that inward eye/Which is the bliss of solitude;/ And then my heart with pleasure fills/And dances with the daffodils.' The image of the dancing fox in

the stillness of the night captures – for the speaker – the ultimate expression of the overflowing innate joy in an individual.

The last poem under discussion in the paper is “View from the Window,” the speaker here takes on the persona of a person/child unwell and bedridden by the side of the window. The window gives a panoramic view of the happenings of the world outside – the changing colour of the cherry leaves, the spin of the winged maple seeds as they fall onto the ground, the fruit of the blackberry, the noisy mynah birds making nests, the intermittent call of the hawk cuckoo (“I slept so well, I slept so well”), the visits of the small squirrel for the crumbs and the communication with boy in the mule: ‘A boy on a mule passes by on the rough mountain track./ He sees my face at the window and waves to me./I wave back to him./ When I’m better I’ll ask him to let me ride his mule’. The humane end to the panorama is a crucial observation – human contact is the ultimate necessity (for us); even our harmonious existence in the cradle of sublime nature is incomplete without human companionship. So, we find Ruskin Bond shunning marriage (for whatever reason) but not a family – as has already been stated earlier, he happily lives with his adopted family in Mussoorie.

### **Conclusion:**

The representative poems by Ruskin Bond discussed in this paper bring to the fore the importance of nature and natural settings in Bond’s worldview. It appears that like Wordsworth, nature is a friend, philosopher, and guide to Bond. The philosopher and guide in nature directs him in his spiritual

quest; it has been found that there is always a spiritual end to his passionate appreciation of natural beauty and treasures. Bond's spiritual quest is meditative, solitary, and marked by minute observation of the elements of nature. The contemplative peace and joy in the poems can be discovered in the silence of the (Himalayan) mountains, deserts, company of the wildflowers ("Wild Flowers"), animals ("Lone Fox Dancing"), insects ("So Beautiful the Night"), and in the ordinary mule driver seen from the open window ("View from the Window"). From the assessment of the poems, we can arrive at the postulation that Bond's reclusiveness, love, and dependence on nature can be meaningfully related to his birth and growth in the Himalayan region; further, it can also be justifiably argued that his personal tragedies (the separation of his parents, the death of his father when he was just nine years old, etc) and the early years of struggle to establish himself as a writer affected his choice and treatment of the subject matter. □□

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