

EXPLORATION OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE IN RUSKIN BOND'S VAGRANTS IN THE VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

A connection to nature is a sense of joint destiny and belonging between humans and the rest of the natural world. We may exist in a relationship physically distant or close to nature, but, a sense of connection keeps nature close to heart. In reality, humans are always the dependents of Mother Nature. Ecopsychology studies the relationship between human beings and the natural world through ecological and psychological principles. The field seeks to develop and understand the ways of expanding the emotional connection between individuals and the natural world, thereby assisting individuals to develop sustainable lifestyles and to give remedies for alienation from nature.

A central premise of Ecopsychology is that while today the human mind is affected and shaped by the modern social world, its deep structure is inevitably adapted to and informed by the human natural environment. Ruskin Bond, a twentieth-century Indian writer of British descent has been connecting himself with the world through nature which has been reflected through his writings. According to Ruskin Bond, emotional connections of humans with nature will be more effective through direct experience, for which we should be placing equal value in spending regular and quality time interacting with the natural world.

KEYWORDS: *Nature, Eco Psychology, Emotional Well Being, Interpersonal Relationship*

INTRODUCTION

“Cherish the natural world because you’re part of it and you depend on it” -Sir David Attenborough

Man is a component in the world of nature, but, gone are the days when man worshipped nature. Greed for money, power and indelible fame are driving mankind on the wheels of competitions thrashing down the feathers of our mother earth by erecting the tallest buildings and factories polluting the environment. In the past, people followed certain ethics for the living and earning but at present, the total scenario has changed. Accretion of wealth has spread contagiously among the humans. They fail to realize the undeadly mettle of nature.

Ruskin Bond, a twentieth-century Indian writer of British descent has been connecting with nature and gaining solace from nature, which has been reflected through his writings. Nature has played a significant role in shaping Bond, the man, and the artist. The hills and the rivers, the flowers and the trees have all gone into shaping his personality. They figure in his stories very often and bind them together in a pattern. Nature this is a dominant feature in the stories of Ruskin Bond.

Bond's obsession with trees has come down to him from his father. A world without trees is a nightmare to him. Ruskin Bond's father introduced him to nature as the best friend of human beings. According to Bond, emotional connections with nature come through direct experience. He states the reason that we should be placing equal value in spending regular and quality time interacting with the natural world. To this day, Mr. Bond, the eightyfouryearold young writer has not forgotten this. His writings on the wild-flowers, ladybirds, the smell of the rains and thunder lights retain this charm.

In *Vagrants in the Valley*, Rusty's enjoyment with his friend Kishen in the realm of nature gave Rusty an intimacy of emotional well being. Rusty loved the hills which offered him their own freedom. He gained strength from nature from the trees because more than anything else, they gave him the confidence to be himself. Rusty drank water from the hillside which rejuvenated his spirits.

Certain researchers propose that an individual's connection to nature can improve their interpersonal relationship and emotional well being. Ecopsychology is the field of study that defines the relationship between the human beings and the natural world through ecological and psychological principles. This field seeks to develop and understand ways of expanding the emotional connection between individuals and the natural world, thereby assisting individuals with eco-friendly lifestyles and rendering remedies for alienation from nature. Bond has painted his fictional characters in the same way as defined by Ecopsychologists.

Statement of Ruskin Bond also coincides with a study defined by the University of Rochester which has found that when exposed to nature, people tend to feel more generous, more connected to their community and more socially conscious. Studies have shown that Hearing the sound of running water can have a calming effect and also having indoor plants can reduce headaches and fatigue.

Rusty was in Hathi's house, sitting on a string cot out in the courtyard there was snow on the tiled roof and in the fields, but the sun was quite warm. The mountains stretched away, disappearing into sky and cloud. Rusty felt he belonged there, to the hills and the pine and deodar forests, and the clear mountain streams. (*Vagrants in the Valley* 182)

Ruskin Bond can be considered not only as a fiction writer but also a poet and also a psychiatrist who is more concerned with the psyche of the readers and their wellbeing. Hence, he always creates his characters as the lovers of nature. He plays a pivotal role in transcending his readers as socially conscious and caring citizens.

Next morning the three boys went down to the pool to bathe. The smell of the neem trees, the sound of the water, the touch of the breeze, intoxicated them, filled them with a zest for living. They ran over the wild wood – sorrel, over the dew-drenched grass down to the water. (*Vagrants in the Valley* 166)

According to the Healing Power of Nature, doctors advise the people to unplug from the miseries and troubles of daily life and allow themselves to focus on the present "Now". Connecting with nature encourages one to be in the present moment, to quiet one's mind and take in the sights, sounds and smells that surround one to minimize the stress level.

In *Vagrants in the Valley*, Bond has presented his characters who depend on nature to get consolation, to get rejuvenation, to strengthen their interpersonal relationship, to gain a sense of freedom and to gain confidence. Rusty's loneliness was shouldered by Kishen whose companionship made Rusty flutter beautifully like a butterfly in the gentle breeze. They had a very good time together though nobody bestowed them with bowers of shelter. In spite of all forsakenness, they did not even forsake even a minute's enjoyment with nature.

Ruskin Bond, through his characters Rusty, Sudheer and Ram Singh brings out the significance of nature, gifted to mankind.

Rusty woke first, scratching and rubbing his legs
Looking up at the skylight, he saw the first glimmer of dawn
He slipped on his clothes and torn socks and without waking
Sudheer or the old man unlatched the door and stepped outside.
Before he lay a world It had snowed in the early hours of the
morning while they had been sleeping.
Rusty did not immediately wake the others. He wanted this all to
himself- the snow and the silence and the coming of the sun.
(*Vagrants in the Valley* 190 - 191)

Rusty ran to the top of the hill and stood in the dazzling sunlight shading his eyes from the glare taking in the range of mountain, the valley and the stream that cut its way through the snow like a dark trickle of oil. When Sudheer asked complainingly, "Why, have you found your treasure?" Rusty replies that "more than that – it has snowed (*Vagrants in the Valley*191). Environmental psychology revealed that people who were exposed to nature for as little as twenty minutes a day experienced elevated energy levels and better overall mood than those who were not. Rusty on seeing the snow-covered mountains gains an elevated mood when compared to Sudheer who has not witnessed the beauty of the snow at that time.

Human beings' relationship with Nature is in the state of discovery, to be discovered again, to be explored again that has been forgotten in the fast flying schedule of lifestyle. Yet here is a healer and explorer in the disguise of a writer, a nature lover, Ruskin Bond who through his words and works gives simple yet invaluable remedies for man's alienation with nature and he teaches mankind how to gain happiness and confidence to lead the life with the touch of Nature.

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