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Environmental Concern in Ruskin Bond's Select Stories

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Ruskin Bond is a living legend who has been portraying life and experiences merged with environmental concern in his stories. His creative works are the celebration of the environment in which he lives, especially hills and mountains. He believes that the natural environment is a pure bubbling life force, which quickens every object and creature to act, to respond and to grow. Nature charges and refreshes his creative vigor. The association with the natural environment imbibes nature's attributes like innocence, simplicity and purity.

Bond's characters live very close to natural environment. Unlike his well-known contemporaries who are especially concerned with social political turmoil, he takes up the issue of ecology and environment through his stories in most conspicuous manner. The problem of deforestation and pollution of environment and decay of lands and fields have been the subject of his stories. Bond is constantly scribbling about the hazard of pollution of environment. The planned destruction of trees on mountain slopes in the name of progress and development is the theme of his stories. Bond relates the death of trees to the painful death of his own father and brother. Bond's short story "The Cherry Tree" is a typical story of a child and his close association with environment. In "The Cherry Tree" Bond speaks of his own reflection through a boy Rakesh.

The story is a depiction of young Bond's friendship with the tree. It reveals the relationship between the boy Rakesh and his grandfather. The germination of a cherry seed into a baby plant and the growth of the plant into a tree spread love and understanding not only between the old and the young but also between the boy Rakesh and the cherry tree. Bond beautifully portrays the cherry tree and its protective and productive attitude in facilitating its own minimum effort to unfold its peace and power that human can feel underneath.

Rakesh is a six years old boy living with his grandfather, a retired forest ranger, in a little cottage outside Mussoorie. His parents are farmers in a small village, fifty miles away. Since there are no schools in the village, his parents have sent him to his grandfather. (Bond, *A Treasury of Stories for Children* "The Cherry Tree" 100).

"The Cherry Tree" is a conventional story about a small boy, full of nature and children's love. He conveys to his young readers, the need to plant, the need to protect the plants to maintain the ecological balanced and to keep the atmosphere safe and pure and to protect the people from pollution. Bond reiterates the same idea in "The Tree Lover" Where, the Grandfather explains his grandson, the need of planting (Bond, "The Tree Lover" 73). Bond recalls through his boy protagonist Rakesh, in this story, the planting excursions with his grandfather in the slopes of Mussoorie. It nurtured him a great naturalist. The boy Rakesh is none other than Bond himself.

Like a typical child, Rakesh looks curiously at the tree every morning, but it does not seem to be growing very fast. Like a typical child, he stops looking at it, though he cannot resist the temptation of taking a peep out of the corner of his eye. Bond narrates such scarcely noticed miracle not only in "The Cherry Tree" but also in his poem "Silent Birth". The poem teaches the readers, its humbleness, forbearance, tolerance and silence of the little seed when it gives birth to a baby plant. Bond renders harmony between Nature and human in "The Cherry Tree" as well as in "Silent Birth" It is apt to show the suffering in silence in the tiny seed who sacrifices itself to create a new life in the world.

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Ruskin Bond's *Book of Verse* "Silent Birth"

"When the earth gave birth to this tree,

There came no sound

A green shoot thrust

In silence from the ground

Our births don't come so quiet
Most lives run riot
But the bud opens silently,
And flower gives way to fruit
So must we search
For the stillness within the tree,
The silence within the root" (221)

The plant Rakesh grows, assumes the role of a guardian spirit. When it is small he has to guard the plant when the plant becomes young, it takes the roll of a guardian in protecting, consoling, comforting and sharing his joy and sorrow. Bond remembers the poem by George Morris taught by his grandfather that he mentioned in his story "The Tree Lover" which reflects the same notion of protection.

"Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now" (Bond, "The Tree Lover" 76).

The new shoot reminds Bond of his father. Bond imagines his father back to life through new shoots. Rakesh expresses his surprise and joy in looking at the new shoot is that of Bond who watches over his father who comes to life in the form of new plant. If he was put away like this, the boy thought that he will get into the root of a plant and then he'll become a flower and then may be a bird will come and carry his seed away and he will get out somehow. (Bond, "The Funeral" 232).

Summer arrives, the cherry plant has sent out new shoots with tender leaves, declaring its victory over the foes as if David defeats Goliathe. The growth of the plant represents the boy Rakesh who also grows taller and now he is eight, a sturdy boy with curly black hair and blackberry eyes. That monsoon, Rakesh goes to his village to help his parents with the planting, plowing, and sowing. Bond narrates an ordinary village boy who is going to school by walking for hours and takes part in helping his parents in their field work. Rakesh represents children of Indian village who share their parent's work.

Bond imparts to his readers that such an affection, love and care require towards plants and nature as their fellow beings. Here, Bond takes a chance of insisting his children readers to have the same amount of care in nursing the plant.

In "Our Trees still Grow in Dehra" Bond shares his experience of being beneath the cherry tree like Rakesh that last summer Bond spent a night in the pine-knoll, sleeping in the grass beneath the cherry tree, listening to the chatter of stream and the occasional tonk - tonk of a night jar, and watching through the branches overhead, the star twinkling in the sky and he felt the power of sky and the earth and power of a small cherry seed.

In the forest, the crickets and cicadas begin tuning suddenly the cherry tree is full of the sound of insects. This reminds the readers of Bond's *Rain in the Mountains* (91) where Bond ponders the sound of joy made by the birds and insects. Birds and insects express their joy at the termination of the hot weather and expectation of the cool quenching relief of the monsoon while the cherry tree is filled with virgin blossoms of that year. Both Rakesh and grandfather are intoxicated by the cacophony of the nature around them.

The story "The Cherry Tree" almost reads like a poem. The different stages of the growth as well as the constant threat to

the death of the tree is described in minute detail with pointed reference to seasonal changes and the flora and the fauna of the area, and with special reference to the growth of Rakesh himself. The cumulative effect is that the tree becomes almost human. It even has visitors. It gives shade to grandfather and shelter to Rakesh. At the end of the story it gives Rakesh the feeling that he has, in his own small way, shared in God's function of creation.

The story is about a loving grandfather who introduces the child Rakesh to the world of nature that makes him a part of protecting the environment. Planting a tree by the small child is initial and a progressive step towards the concern over the environment in which one lives. The grandfather becomes the loving source of his grandchild's growth and self -knowledge to plant and to grow trees.

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