

Biophilic codependency: an essential discussion in the Writings of manoj das and ruskin bond

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ABSTRACT

Environment is an inseparable part of our lives and society. To keep our eco-system moving in a balanced way, co-dependency is mostly needed. The co-dependency between humans, non-humans, living as well as non-living creatures. Just like two sides of a same coin, they all complete each other. Be it science, technology, logic, literature, scripture or mythology, every field suggests this concept. Unfortunately, modern human actions have gone astray and too much materialistic view has almost attacked that biophilic co-dependency. In present time, ecology is at stake and many critics, writers, social activists, learned men as well as common people, across the globe, are coming in support of our environment. In this regard, two leading Indian authors Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond have always been in the fore-front. The present paper aims to explore their concern towards ecology and their way of projecting biophilic co-dependency in Indian environment. Being chiefly children story writers, they avail the chance to educate young minds about various crucial issues. In many of their writings, the beauty and generosity of nature is projected, while in other works the exploitation of humans over nature and its inhabitants and in some others, the bond between human and nature. The present study covers Das's stories like "The Submerged Valley", "Son and Father" from the collection *The Bridge in the Moonlit Night and Other Stories* likewise, Bond's stories "My Father's Trees Still Grow in Dehra", "Guests Who Come in from the Forest" and "Good Shot, Mehmoud!" from the story collection *The Jungle Omnibus*. These stories highlight the ecological bond between humans and the flora and fauna not only on the surface level, but deep down also they force the readers to have a critical view on the matter.

KEYWORDS: Biophilic, co-dependency, flora and fauna, exploitation, ecology, rescue.

1) INTRODUCTION

Ecological perspective of Indian society, especially, by reviewing the writings of the two eminent Indian English writers, Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond, will be very much helpful for further works in the field of green studies. There is no better way to highlight such crucial concept and theory, other than literature. The short fictions of the above-mentioned writers, use fantasy, realism, relatable characters and background represent a biophilic view point of Indians as a whole. The interdependency among all creatures, keeps the eco-system ever growing systematically. Both Bond and Das express their concern towards variable directions of challenges and troubles affecting this correlation. Humans need to look into and analyse the chaotic and materialistic attitude that has risen as a threat to our environment Humans' interference with nature and destructive activities; importance of natural world, helpfulness of trees; beauty of tiny non-human living beings and their innocence respectively. Through the present discussion we can relate to a novel approach to nature and find a different way to look at the cooperation between worlds of non-human creatures and human beings, the way modern human perceives it and the awareness he needs to be aware of everything accordingly. Das is unique in his treatment of various things all together. He entertains, educates, create concerns, enables special insight to various things in his readers, he gives underlying messages and his characters seem to be one of common folk like us. He gives lifelike presentation of our own living atmosphere and Raja (2014) aptly points out his speciality in writing, "The greatest gift he seems to have imbibed from the tradition is the subtle and natural art of mingling natural and supernatural and men with animals" (Raja, 2014: 25). Ecological perspective of Indian society, especially through various literary genres, is the best way to highlight and study. Its numerous crucial concept and theory with the use fantasy, realism, relatable

characters and background represent a biophilic view point of Indians as a whole. The interdependency among all creatures, keeps the eco-system ever growing systematically. Literary figures express their concern towards variable directions of challenges and troubles affecting this correlation. Humans need to look into and analyse the chaotic and materialistic attitude that has risen as a threat to our environment. Humans' interference with nature and destructive activities; importance of natural world, helpfulness of trees; beauty of tiny non-human living beings and their innocence respectively. Through the present discussion we can relate to a novel approach to nature and find a different way to look at the cooperation between worlds of non-human creatures and human beings, the way modern human perceives it and the awareness he needs to be aware of everything accordingly. Humans, animals, birds, trees all belong to one domain of living creatures and inseparable from each other. On mutual understanding and dependency life becomes smooth and meaningful. The term biophilic implies something related to nature and natural world and our dependency on it is a forever truth. About this co-relation, Singh (2023) comments, "The history of environmental education spans human evolution and the evolving awareness of humanity's relationship with the natural world" (Singh, 2023: 24). In fact, we are always in need from our environment. We need food, air, water, fuel, rain, soil and what not. But in return, we never think of giving back, rather don't even hesitate to destroy it with our self-obsessed actions. We fail to understand the fatal consequences of it. Our natural habitat helps us lift the level of our living in so many ways. Creatures other than humans, make our lives wholesome, but we fail to recognize their contributions to the world. Coleridge (1802) acknowledges the charity of nature, "O Lady! We receive but what we give, And in our life alone does Nature live: Ours is her wedding garments, ours her shroud!" (Coleridge, 1802: 47-49). However, literature plays a great role in conveying this message to the world. For literary figures like Rousseau, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hardy, Goldsmith and others, nature has been a vital source of discussion. Similarly, in Indian literary arena too nature is highly appreciated from time to time. Indian writers prioritize nature, no matter north, south, east or west, every part of the country with its natural landscape is beautified. There has been discussion of nature-human relationships in most of the cases. Looking way back, we can get evidences of the same in Kalidasa's *Meghadutta*, Janaki Lenin's *My Husband and Other Animals*, Purna Singh Bindra's *The King and I* and many to be counted with the tendency to prioritize nature. It is the diversifying quality, figure, attitude and shape of non-human creatures those make them uniquely beautiful and amazing. In the natural domain, multiple variants of plants, animals, insects, bugs, trees and others survive and each has parallel roles; that's why we all are codependent. But unfortunately, modern people have completely forgotten and ignored this age-old relationship and made the whole globe chaotic. Extremely materialistic attitude has brought the atmosphere on the verge of collapsing. With the growing number of industries, buildings, vehicles cutting down of trees, we have unknowingly increased the amount of U.V. rays, temperature, reduced production of food grains, unbelievable climatic changes are affecting lives. Nature is useful for us in every aspect, especially for our day-to-day living. Nevertheless, the concern is not limited to groundwater resource or Algeria only, rather it is concern for every bit of priceless nature across the globe. This concern is presented by Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond in their short fictions. They are extra-ordinary in their realistic presentation of Indian people and their association with environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(3) Jaiswal (2019) is of the opinion that Manoj Das is a master of fictional writings. Displaying this, she presents Das's love for Indianness and rich heritage of India. The stories of Das, Jaiswal has taken into account have examples of belief system, emotion and ethos of Indian society. The stories of Das become mirror to Indian cultural background.

(4) Elakkiya and Ganeshram (2019) view Ruskin Bond as an efficient children story writer. Through his story "The Funeral", they discuss Bond's fantasy and mesmerising presentation of child psychology. The story being semi-autobiographical in its tone, is a narration of Bond's own childhood experiences.

(5) Bakyalakshmi and Jain (2020) deal with the narrative technique of Bond. His way of presenting people, society, life and different ideologies, has its own beauty. His characters become inspiration for the readers in various aspects. His writings, very often depict his own life story and thus use first person narrative.

(6) Jana's (2020) research work is a picturisation of emotional and sentimental side of Bond's characters. Jana's observation highlights Bond's impression of love and affection. His characters are away from physical love or sensuality, rather his idea of love is beyond age, caste and religion. His characters look for emotional support and this is depicted by Jana.

2) RESULT

The inseparable elements of environment, make the whole world worthy and friendly for surviving. Nature in every way is cordial, hospitable as well as charitable. We only take from it, but never give it back. Be it the pure

white bliss of winter, greenery of paddy fields, fragrance of flowers, generosity of trees, delicious food, fresh breathing air and many more to count. We enjoy them and remain dependant on nature, yet ungrateful to it. Modern man has ignored this and forgotten his duty towards the rest of the environment. Bond, like Wordsworth, is overjoyed at the sight of natural scenario. Wordsworth feels that his heart dances at the view of daffodils, the same happens with Bond then he sees nature. With similar vibe and intensity Bond weaves these lines that show his minute observation of nature, “Whenever I am stuck in the middle of a story or an essay, I go into my tiny hillside garden and get down to the serious business of transplanting or weeding or pruning or just plucking off dead blooms, and in no time at all I’m struck with a notion of how to proceed with the stalled story, reluctant essay or unresolved poem” (Bond, 1993: 225). Das is no less in love with nature. For him nature takes various forms and is a true companion. Samir’s feelings get shape and are expressed only by different forms of nature and in the other story it is seen, how important our natural habitation is. As a village dweller since birth, similar inclination and sentiment occurs in him too. He observes the activities and view point of his fellow beings quite thoughtfully, at the same time shows concern and admiration respectively. His writings are the mirrors to society, life-style, systems, ideologies, activities and so on. His protagonists express his first-hand experience regarding so many things from his surroundings. Having lived in a shattered family after his parents’ separation, his father’s death and his mother’s second marriage and more than that his step father’s somewhat harsh treatment had brought him closer to nature. His father was a lover of nature and that quality Bond inherited. The more we read these two figures in field of Indian English fiction, more we get to know about our own country. They look at it from a completely different angle. Dilip Bobb is aptly correct when he comments about Bond, “Sitting at his desk in Ivy Cottage... precariously perched on a spur in the hills of Mussoorie, Ruskin Bond looks out from his window and sees and hears things we have blind and deaf to” (Bobb, 1995: 249). All the four stories discussed here, bring out the authentic presentation and concern of both Das and Bond. Their sole aim is to create a certain awareness regarding the on-going destruction of our surrounding in the name of improvisation. While one tries to open eyes using fables and literary devices and innocent picturisation of natural habitation, the other one uses satirical vein to expose human follies and its consequences. Rural people are too much grounded and rooted in their customary. Das had that habit and nature. He had always been down-to-earth and that thing evokes a worshiper of nature in him. The stories dealt here have given shape to their realistic and sincere feeling towards nature. They feel pity and sympathetic towards them, which can’t even express their agony. As Atkulwar and Warkad (2023) view Bond, “Ruskin Bond has always remained a true lover of nature. His stories observe and contemplate the symbiotic connection between man and nature” (Atkulwar & Warkad, 2023: 11).

3) DISCUSSION

Manoj Das (1934-2021) holds a high place among Indian writers, who write in English. Mostly famous as a children story writer, Das has contributed to the fields like magazine, novella, short story, poem etc. His characters basically portray the village dwellers, ups and downs in their lives, their association with eco-system. He is a great narrator of old epics, mythologies and very well entwines them with modern context. Some of his most regarded story collections are *The Bridge in the Moonlit Night and Other Stories*, *Mystery of the Missing Cap and Other Stories*, *Farewell to a Ghost and Other Stories* and many more. The settings of all of them represent Indian countryside atmosphere and natural habitat within them. Story of Das to be discussed here are “The Submerged Valley” and “Son and Father”. Samal in praise of Daas’s multi-faceted literary production writes, “He combines Tagore’s tragic awareness and Fakir Mohn’s (Father of Oriya short story and fiction) satiric stance and comic perception. He combines Maupassant’s sense of plot and direct dramatic presentation, Chekhov’s sense of sympathy and mystery and O’ Henry’s tricks and understanding of human psyche” (Samal, 1997: 10).

The former one “The Submerged Valley”, as the title suggests is about a certain valley or region that is going to be lost in water. In the natural domain, there are multiple variants of plants, animals, birds, bugs, insects, humans and other creatures have parallel roles in this existing universe. Ashrafuzzaman et. al., are of the opinion about biodiversity, especially in water eco-system that, “Some aquatic plants are emergent and rooted on the bottom, while others are submerged. Still, others are free-floating, and some are rooted in the banks of the impoundments, adapting to semi-aquatic habitats” (Ashrafuzzaman et. al., 2023: 555). Every living element is a part and partial of our environment. Similarly, in the present story, the loss of a river and its adjacent plain land. The incident is taken from the speaker’s childhood. His father was a high-ranked engineer and lived with his family in town. When the news of building new bridge over the river, all the senior villagers went to his father for solution. In no way they wanted to leave their native land and go somewhere else. Even though the govt. promised to pay compensation, yet they didn’t want the money and requested very often to stop the construction. At the very outset of the story, we see the narrator’s love for trees and natural environment. He sees human qualities in them and enjoys their

company. When he was in village school, he witnessed trees being emotionally connected to people. Das aptly mentions,

The trees that stood in front of our school used to appear as human to us as the wandering bull of Lord Shiva. One of the trees looked as if it was kneeling in meditation. Two more were never tired of chattering to each other. If the teacher had scolded or thrashed us, they seemed to be sympathizing with us. (*The Bridge in the Moonlit Night and Other Stories*,71).

However, the construction didn't stop. Some people left for town, in search of food and work, while others went to neighbouring village, with their family, kettle and luggage. The dam was made and all the nearby regions were safe from the river. But it wasn't that smooth as it seemed. Ruining river of other natural asset can never bring harmony and that's quite vibrant here. Profit, safety and development remained limited to the lists and portfolios only. Towards the end of the story, there comes the destructive side of nature. Because of human's never-ending cruelty over nature, such consequences are unavoidable. A terrifying storm comes and everyone is bound to leave the site of construction and the river, whose direction and bank are lost, becomes ferocious. This is an unavoidable instance of today's world. We are on the verge of collapsing as a society or world may be. We need to be calculative in our decisions and doings otherwise the natural world won't take time to be hostile instead of its motherly and friendly quality. Similar kind of narration of flora and fauna is found in Divakaruni's work as she praises the peaceful scenic beauty. "I loved Mithila – its cool, crisp breezes that came down from the mountains... and its gentle people who loved to sing and dance" (Divakaruni, 2019: 14).

Another story of Das is "Son and Father", where Nature has played the role of agent, an agent of emotions. Everything protagonist Samir goes through or feels is displayed by numerous events and elements of nature. The condition of the natural surroundings is so intense that Samir gets stuck between his illusion and reality of the outside world. He is all alone in that building provided by his forester friend for halting. A watchman is there in the charge of serving him. There are two other characters; a widower and his son. The father's inner conflict and tragedy are equally ferocious as the storm outside. Samir is spending his night in a forest guest house and imagines the distant horizon. Das's interpretation of nature is so mesmerising that one can fall in love with it instantly. He finds beauty even in the chaotic and terrifying scene of thunderclap. "Never before had Samir imagined that the sky had so much energy in store – to go on and on with the display of such awfully long fireworks of lightning, booming all the while at variant scales" (p. 133). Samir saw the boy, the watchman's son, roaming in that riotous weather and two dogs were his companions. However, the boy dies in lightning and it shatters Samir. He feels the pain and grief like a part of their family and is dumbfounded. After that stormy night and his halt for 3 days, when he finally comes out of his house, he finds the dead body of the boy being buried by his father. There comes another line that defines humans' association with nature and how it wraps us in its soothing arms. The boy died because of strong lightning and finally went into the deep earth. "Whatever the sky had left, was taken over by the earth," observed the father" (p. 137). The story is reflecting on nature's feeling and the way humans need to understand it and get themselves more acquainted to the non-human habitation. Be it tree, river, animal, bird or something else, everything from natural habitation sympathies us in our grief and become equally overwhelmed in our happiness. Though Das is much into children story, but he never lets behind in highlighting the scenic beauty, natural landscape, nature's ever-kind nature and its connection with the human world.

Ruskin Bond, (1934-) who is widely known as the Wordsworth of India, has much inclination towards natural surroundings. His works, one way or another, discuss ecological concerns and issues. Residing in the hillside, from a very early life, he has minutely observed nature there. The melancholy of hills, calmness of streams, beauty of small forests, soothing music of birds and sweetness of moonlit night, all have possessed distinct places in his mind and heart, as well as his magnum opuses. Describing Bond's immense love for ecology, Tiwari (2016) writes, Bond's stories manifest deep love for creatures. He understands the importance of wild life and its inhabitants... There is a constant reference to the environmental problems in the short stories of Ruskin Bond. He does not emerge as an environmentalist but is rather suggestively points at this serious matter in a very subtle way (Tiwari, 2016: 529).

Now his soul is inseparable from those regions and landscapes. He has loved India as a country and more as a natural habitation. "For me, India has always been an atmosphere, an emotional more than a geographical entity" (Bond, 1989: 9). His love for natural scenario in places like Shamli, Shahganj, Panipat, Pipalkot, Dehradun, Mussoorie are never-ending. Just like Kipling, who found beauty in faintest things of nature, Bond too was attracted even by the negligible entities of natural world. Kipling concludes, "I have always felt the menacing darkness of tropical eventides, as I have loved the voices of night-winds through palm or banana leaves, and the song of the tree frogs" (Kipling, 1990: 3). The similar way, Bond gets overwhelmed at the sight of even meanest of particle of

existing environment. His story “Guests Who Come in from the Forest” is a simple story that highlights immense love and joy of Bond, when he beholds wild creatures. His own feeling is reflected through his protagonist’s actions and thoughts. The speaker’s small cottage in the hills, becomes a shelter for many of them during rainy days. They come there, sit, fly, eat and move without any danger or trouble. A bamboo beetle flies in and falls in a water jug and the speaker saves it twice. A deep purple whistling thrush comes in to save itself from rain and sits on the windowsill, maintaining safe distance. A squirrel climbs on to the dining table to eat small bits of left-over food. The narrator deliberately leaves those small food particles for him. Next is a green mantis that fearlessly moves inside the room, sometimes on bookshelf and at other time, gazing itself in the mirror. A bat also becomes one of his visitors and flies very low inside his drawing room. This unusual low flying fascinates the speaker so much that he starts researching on it and finds that this is a rare breed of bat. This small bat has remained unnoticed and uncared by the forest authorities. His concern and disappointment in this respect is seen in these lines below, “And I feel rather offended that modern authorities should have ignored this tiny bat; possibly they feel that it is already extinct. It so, I’m pleased to have rediscovered it” (p. 164). The balance between humans and non-humans is the most needed thing for our environment. This correlation keeps everyone growing together without any hostility or conflict. Everyone has his/her share of rights and contributions towards society. The above discussed text proves this concept. The speaker is in awe of all the creatures coming into his house. Sometimes he is saving one from drowning in his water jug, at other times he is putting a praying mantis near another one in the hope that they are friends. He cares for them and doesn’t want them to be separated or feel lonely. While at some other times he is so intrigued by a small bat that starts turning pages of book after book to know about it in detail.

Likewise, another story of Bond, “My Father’s Trees Still Grow in Dehra”, is a clear expansion of his own feelings regarding nature. As his own childhood was, scattered and painful, because of his parent’s separation and death of his father, so is the case with the protagonist here. Nevertheless, the speaker collects humanistic approach of natural world and personifies the same. Here the emotional connection between trees and men, the medicinal and other valuable qualities of trees are enough to mesmerise the readers. The speaker recollects his childhood nostalgia, when he talks about Dehra, his birth place, where he had lived two decades back. Now he is visiting that place and living the old days once again. He recalls his deceased father and his father’s sentimental bond with trees and plants. To represent this, he narrates one such event, when narrator feels that one particular twig is moving towards his father. “As we sat there, doing nothing in particular – in the best gardens, time has no meaning – I found that the tendril was moving almost imperceptibly away from me and towards my father. Twenty minutes later it had crossed the veranda steps and was touching his feet” (p. 43). There were a number of trees in their garden, still his father wanted to plant more. He could sense the scarcity of greenery in near future. During rainy season, he would plant many saplings on a rocky island, across the river. He had very well prophesised that one day the world had been struggling with heat and loss of trees, but this small patch of land would remain lush green. The speaker now finds it to be turning into a reality. “In contrast with the dry, rocky river-bed, the little island is a green oasis. I walk across to the trees and notice that a number of parrots have come to live in them” (p. 44-45). Among that lush foliage he feels as if the trees are communicating with him and giving signs of familiarity; bending towards him and moving, exactly the way his father had dreamt. It is no way possible for a tree or branch of a tree to move so fast like animals, birds or humans. In fact, it is Bond’s love for trees and plants that in his imagination he makes them personified.

The last story of Bond, discussed here is “Good Shot, Mehmoud!”, that has shattering picture of human’s unfair treatment towards wild creatures. In a satirical and ironic tone Bond, exposes the ill-treatment of human civilization for the fulfilment of their temporary wish. The protagonist here has become the representative of all modern humans, who don’t give it a second thought before killing any innocent wild life. The story begins with a conversation between the speaker and Mehmoud, the house help, about shooting animals in jungle. The later describes how once he along with his master Carpet-sahib had gone for their day’s shooting and all the incidents. He says all of a sudden, a deer came in front him and taking permission of his master he shot it. There the harsh reality is shown as the master is too pleased and when Mehmoud asks permission he says, “Go ahead, old chap,” he said. “Let’s have some venison for dinner” (p. 93). The protagonist mentions all the incidents with certain pride as he got to shoot animals all by himself. Then he says that the deer escaped, but the bullet unknowingly hit a big leopard which is even more proud thing. Humans’ ruthless attitude comes to limelight that they kill birds and animals for their flesh, skill, bone and what not. The central figure again says that for his courageous deed his master awarded him with certain sum of money. “And since I did not want the skin, he rewarded me with five hundred rupees. The leopard was stuffed and kept in his veranda, to scare away the monkeys. Of course, he told everyone what a good shot I was” (Pp. 93-94). This shows our non-calculating activities. We don’t even pay any

heed to other creatures, their silent screams, plight and pain; nor do we give any emphasis to our ecology. We go on destroying the lush foliage and violating the balance between all creatures of eco-system. This thing will definitely give a horrifying consequence which the whole world has to face. Even it has started giving initial instances like climate change, lack of productivity in trees, infertile soil, land sliding, earthquake and other pathetic things. Still humans are remaining ungrateful to nature.

The way Narwal (2021) points out, “In the present era, environmental awareness should be developed among the masses particularly among youths. For environmental awareness, it is necessary for the whole society to work at a grass root level for safeguarding the environment. To generate the environmental values among youth, it is important to know the responsibility towards environment and behave like eco-friendly” (Narwal, 2021: 4801). Likewise, is the view of Das and Bond. By training young minds, they build up a reasonable world worthy and safe for environment and wild life. They start to show the seed of a balanced society in the minds of their young readers. In entertaining way, they start to stabilise their thought and duty towards wildlife. Both Das and Bond have implied every possible way to spread the idea of re-forestation and solutions save the precious natural resource in their immortal works. We just need to understand their motive and workout their ideologies to make this world a better place to live for all the dwellers. Every individual has its way of living and this is what makes that unique. That is why all have equal rights to live and influence others positively.

4) CONCLUSION

Das and Bond have dealt with many parallel themes and ideas. They both belonging to two different parts of the country, have many variations in concepts, traditions and cultures, yet their notion of India as a whole is eye-catching. They look beyond regional, cultural, communal and religious barriers and solely focus on India as one globe. Many of their writings being partially their own feelings and experiences, have the truest picture of their time. People of modern India have raised concern in them and they are on the verge of calling out those wrong deeds of humans. Both Das and Bond ask for the rights of animals, birds and nature as a whole. They want safety, shelter and freedom for the natural residents. In the above discussed stories, we witness that exploitation of modern selfish world over those innocent creatures. Very often their simple lucid words have layers of deep meaning and lessons for life. One such element is the treatment of nature and natural beings that is foremostly found in their works. They both stand at the frontline for raising voice for natural environment and that is evidently proved in the present work.

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