

**Ruskin Bond's Crave for the Creation in *The Blue Umbrella* and *An Island of Trees***

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**Abstract**

Every human being gains knowledge through various experiences of nature. Just a passive observation of nature bestows knowledge. The sea, sand, mountains, rivers, plants, animals, climate, temperature and seasons influence the character and thinking of an individual. Environment influences people and inspires them to live ecologically. The emotional attachment and commitment towards environment inspires a person's experience and moulds his personality.

Bond is a seeker of life that lies in innocence, harmful to none and good for all. His world is all affirming; faith in the potentialities of man is steadfast. In his world people learn the art of living in perfect harmony with the creation. They are sensitive to act freely. Unlike the people in big cities, they are more energetic, positive and clear in their perspective. They embody Bond's vision of life and their ways ensure a joyful life free from reckless confrontation and negation.

**Key words:** Nature, mountains, trees, bond, oneness, birds, animals

**Abbreviations:**

*AIT- An Island of Trees*

*TBU- The Blue Umbrella*

## Ruskin Bond's Crave for the Creation in *The Blue Umbrella* and *An Island of Trees*

Nature is an astounding teacher. Man can be in touch with the natural world, whether out in the wild or in the backyard. It gives him a sense of wonder, joy and freedom and helps him feel how intimately he is connected to the whole web of life. Spending time consciously in nature nourishes him physically, emotionally and spiritually. Russell Comstock, yoga teacher and cofounder of the Metta Earth Institute Center for Contemplative Ecology in Lincoln, Vermont, says that the source of that nourishment is the simple fact that man is, inextricably, a part of nature: "Our body is an animal body, governed by natural rhythms- planting and ripeness, daylight and night" (Miller). He adds

that much of the wisdom embodied in the ancient cultural traditions comes from sitting in deep stillness, observing the wild and contemplating the human role in the natural world.

It can be challenging to maintain this perspective in our deadline driven, technology dominated lives. Man gets so caught up in the schedules and to-do lists that he often forgets to peep out of the window. Mankind loses touch with the cycle of life: the flow of the seasons, light and dark, life and death and the interconnectedness to all. Immersing oneself in nature is a great way to awaken to life: to wake up from confusion and suffering and live a life imbued with awareness, compassion and freedom. This is something that many people feel intuitively when they spend time in nature, and that the great outdoors can be psychologically healing.

Spending time in nature aids one to recover from the mental fatigue caused by periods of overstimulation. There are plenty of ways to connect with nature everyday such as gardening, meditating under a tree, listening to the chirping of birds and so on. One can immerse oneself in nature gradually, by walking in the same path through the woods once a week for a year, watching the seasons unfold and taking every step in with all of one's senses. One can even embrace a single moment and let it wash over like a wave, clearing away one's own stressful thoughts, concepts and desires, and leaving him present and connected. Having a calm, focused and receptive mind is crucial for this kind of awakening. One can deepen one's awareness of nature and cultivate a calm, clear focus by unleashing one's creativity in the wild.

When one stops moving and focuses closely enough to draw, write a poem, or take a photograph, he allows himself to slide outside the rush of everyday thoughts and build a more intimate relationship with the world around him. Clare Walker Leslie, a naturalist, has been teaching people the art of nature journaling and drawing for more than thirty years and she can attest to the spiritual awareness that comes from observing nature. She says, “You don’t need a special water bottle or a fleece jacket to be outside; you don’t need the right pens or the right brushes. You just need to pay attention” (Miller).

Children who are taught that the natural world is being destroyed, that the rain forests are being mown down, often tend to withdraw and keep themselves away from nature. This is the time to immerse children in the stuff of the physical and natural worlds. Constructing forts, creating small imaginary worlds, hunting and gathering, searching for treasure, following streams and pathways, making maps, taking care of animals, gardening and shaping the earth are perfect activities during this stage. Eventually, of course, they will learn about the extirpation of the rain forests, but first comes a more direct, and playful connection with the so-called environment.

“One impulse from a vernal wood/ May teach you more of man,/ Of moral evil and of good/ Than all the sages can” (Wordsworth). The quotes beautifully encapsulate Bond’s deep union with the natural world that has inspired him over the decades. He is the one who has sought emotional protection on the lap of the hilly region. This is because of his sad childhood and he feels that he is comfortable amidst the hills and the trees of Dehra and Mussoorie. No wonder these hills are not merely a source of beauty to gaze at, but a

spiritual hinge through which Bond clings to the values of honesty and love to maintain an everlasting relationship.

Reverence to nature is ever present in Bond's works and this devotion is like its life-blood. He is a true devotee of nature, who finds adequate exuberance in exploring its myriad vistas and engraving it with great accuracy on paper. He expresses his oneness with nature in one of his interviews with Nilima Pathak. He exclaims,

For me nature is very personal. That's because I have lived very close to it up in the mountains for the last 35 years. But even before that I was quite in kinship with forests and the general flora of the country. In India, and particularly in the Hindu religion, there's a very strong element of nature. Many of my books and stories have for the last many years had the strong element of the natural world.

Trees are the manifestation of God's benediction. For youngsters trees are their playmates and for elders trees are like good companions with whom they can share their joys and sorrows. Trees preserve the lost gems of childhood and youth. In *The Blue Umbrella*, Biju feels a sense of comfort and confidence while perching on the top of the oak. Bond writes, "The higher he is in the tree the more confident he becomes. It is only when he is down on the ground that he becomes shy and speechless" (67).

Trees are the embodiments of friendship. This relationship is completely free from the stylistic ways of other worldly relationship. Bond conceives an analogy between children and trees that they like children grow rapidly and achieve stateliness if someone

strokes them fondly. In one of Bond's stories there is a reference to an aunt who watered her plants every morning, even during rainy season. She does this regularly because she thinks that the plants expect her every morning.

In *An Island of Trees*, Bond has wonderfully described his intimacy with nature. He speaks of his liking for creatures like hornbill, chameleon, bat, monkeys, goat, snail and even python. There is a splendid nature comparison in the book which goes like this: "In his naked boyhood Harold was no beauty. His promising feature was his flaming red bill, matching the blossoms of the flame tree which was now ablaze..." (AIT 10). If human beings are one with other creatures of nature, they will definitely reciprocate the love. When one feeds animals and birds, the latter feel a kind of bond with the one who feeds them. "Harold's best friends were those who fed him, and he was willing even to share his food with us, sometimes trying to feed me with his great beak" (AIT 12), says Bond.

If Bond delays to feed the hornbill on time, he would summon him with raucous barks and vigorous bangs of his bill on the woodwork of the kitchen window. Bond proudly says that Harold, the hornbill, loves bananas, dates and balls of boiled rice. These creatures have the ability to sense natural happenings too. Harold always wags about rain. "... Harold would start chuckling to himself about an hour before the first raindrops fell" (AIT 13). Not only Bond but also his pets are intimate with nature. When it rains, Harold screams in joy and starts roaring with pleasure.

In the chapter "Koki's Song", there is a reference to animals frequently visiting the river to drink water. In the present world, animals visiting the nearby pools are hunted down

by hunters for multiple purposes. But Bond's world including his characters, do not disturb nature and its elements. For instance, "Koki seldom went beyond the garden wall, because across the river bed was the jungle, and animals frequently came down to the water to drink" (AIT 18).

Animals and birds have their own language like man. Bond is a keen observer of nature and its happenings. He can even identify the call of different species of birds and animals. He is very sensitive even to the small change in natural happenings. Birds twitter when they feel happy and miserable. In *An Island of Trees* there is a marvelous description to bulbuls twittering in the sky. "A couple of bulbuls were twittering away in a rose bush. Grandmother had told Koki that birds sang because they were happy.... For all she knew, birds could just as well be singing because they felt miserable" (21).

Bond is also concerned with the behavior of wild creatures with human beings. Wild animals may turn gentle towards man, if the latter is concerned towards the former. Bond is an admirer of even the horrible creatures of nature. He is very affectionate with his pet chameleon named Henry. Henry is a harmless fellow. If Bond puts his finger in Henry's mouth, even during his wildest moments, he would simply wait for Bond to take his finger out. Bond says, "But Henry seemed convinced that his teeth were there for the sole purpose of chewing food not fingers" (AIT 27).

In *An Island of Trees*, Mukesh's favourite pet is a little black goat. Bond's child heroes are one with birds and beasts and this reflects Bond's own character. When Mukesh finds his goat in the forest, he announced his mother, "She's my friend" (80). But his mother

is not happy with Mukesh's new pet because only a few weeks back Mukesh had started his own zoo in the back garden. There is something fairy-like about the little goat and Mukesh named it Pari, which means 'fairy'. The importance of goat's milk has been unearthed by Bond in this story. When Mukesh's mother hesitates to domesticate the goat, Mukesh says, "Goat's milk is good for your health. I read about it somewhere. That's why I brought her home" (81). Pari has become a good provider of milk and Mukesh's family is greatly benefitted by Pari. Pari is on good terms with everyone in the family but it "butted strangers who bowed too low when entering or leaving by the small courtyard door" (85).

Bond conveys to the reader an idea of the delights that a trekker, a botanist or a mountain lover derives. He has deeply studied and explored the species especially, in his region, the Garhwal Himalayas. Precision of details reflects his sharpness of vision and depth of study. He is well known of their origin, their ecological, mythological, cultural, geological and commercial features. Their shade and shelter, flowers and fruits, beauty and peculiarity, birds and insects perching in the branches all are minutely observed. But what makes the difference is his personal touch with which he approaches them.

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