

Chapter II

Chapter II

RUSKIN BOND AND THE MUSE

“ There’s nothing to keep me here,
 Only these mountains of silence
 And the gentle reserve of shepherds and woodmen
 Who know me as one who
 Walks among the trees.
 Madman, misanthropist ? They make
 Their guesses, smile and pass slowly
 Down the steep path near the cottage
 There’s nothing
 To keep me here, walking
 Among old trees”.
 Ruskin Bond in “Hill – Station”

No critical study of Ruskin Bond is complete without a reference to his in-
 depth love for nature. As Cumberland had shaped the poetic being of Wordsworth,
 likewise Mussoorie which abounds in breath-taking natural beauty has gone a long
 way in moulding Bond’s vision of life.

The present chapter accordingly, studies Bond in relation to his attitude to nature and shows how his short stories are enriched by nature, which has in fact entered the very soul of the writer.

Bond has an instinctive love for nature. Unlike John Donne, he does not rationalize nature or try to impute metaphysical strains in it. He has a remarkable perception of the world of senses. His heightened sensual awareness makes him delve deep into his surrounding environment in such a way that he loses himself in the simple enjoyment of nature. As nature unravels itself before him with its sights, sounds, scents and colours, it casts a spell on him and he becomes its ardent admirer and chronicler.

Like John Keats, Bond brings to the fore the symphony of nature vibrant with the songs of the earth. His heightened awareness enables him to distinguish and decipher the songs of the Himalayan birds and derive immense pleasure from their quaintness. In "Birdsong Heard In The Mountains", he observes the elusive Himalayan birds who are recognizable by their shrill voices rather than by their fleeting appearances. The barbet's "monotonous, far reaching call"¹ can be heard for a mile while the green-backed tit is recognizable by its rather metallic voice. The tiny warbler announces its presence by constantly emitting "four or five unmusical, but nevertheless joyful and penetrating notes".² But it is the whistling thrush that captivates Bond, as it makes the hills reverberate with its enchanting melody. Like Keats's nightingale in "Ode To A Nightingale" it "sings of summer in full-throated ease".³ Its ebullience cannot be dampened even by the icy winter.

Amidst the barren desolate landscape it often bursts into a sweet melody as it flits from one snow-laden tree to the other. Bewitched by its titillating notes and its lack of confidence as it begins its notes, Bond becomes its ardent admirer. His fascination for this quaint Himalayan bird is seen in the lines:

“When I first came to live in the hills, it was the song of the Himalayan whistling thrush that first caught my attention. I was sitting at my window, gazing out at the new leaves on the walnut tree. All was still, the wind was at peace with itself, the mountains brooded massively under the darkening sky. Then emerging like a sweet secret from the depths of a deep ravine came this indescribably beautiful call.

It is a song that never fails to enchant me. The bird starts with a doubtful whistle, as though trying out the tune, then confident of the melody, it bursts into full song, a crescendo of sweet notes and variations ringing clearly across the hillside”⁴.

Bond is again Keatsian in his expression of nature in its rich, pictorial details. His short stories contain vivid descriptions of his native Garhwal hills. He infuses them with such vigour and vitality that they come alive before the mind’s eye. Unlike Shelley’s vague and abstract images, Bond’s images of nature are sensuous, colourful and concrete. His “A Mountain Stream” contains numerous vivid images of nature. Here he divulges his passion for tramping through the forests as it enables him “to feast his eyes on the foliage that sprang up in tropical profusion—soft, spongy moss, great stag fern on the trunks of trees. mysterious and

sometimes evil looking lilies and orchids, wild dahlias and climbing convolvulus opening its purple secrets to the morning sun".⁵

Bond however, is not content with mere visual contact with nature. Like a passionate lover, he yearns for intimate physical contact. His craving turns him into a compulsive walker, as rambling in the forests not only provides him with the opportunity of enjoying the beauty of nature but it also gives him the chance to come in close physical contact with nature. This habit of wandering has thus become his "strongest passion, even stronger than the desire for wine, women and song".⁶

In "Great Trees I Have Known", Bond gives expression to his feeling of joy in establishing intimate contact with trees like the deodar, the oak and the pine. His ecstasy is apparent in the lines: "To return to my trees I went among them often, acknowledging their presence with a touch of my hand against their trunks—the walnut's smooth and polished, the pine's patterned and whorled, the oak's rough, gnarled, full of experience".⁷ He is fascinated by the bare branches of the walnut tree in winter. Stripped off all their leaves, they remind him of the naked arms of a woman. His feelings are clear in the lines: "Standing on its own was a walnut tree and truly this was a tree of all seasons. In winter the branches were bare but they were smooth and straight and round like the arms of a woman in a painting by Jamini Roy".⁸

But it is the deodar with its unsurpassable beauty and grace that captures Bond's imagination. To him its character and elegance make it a vibrant

representation of “ creation in its most noble aspect.”⁹ Bond’s admiration for this tree is apparent in the lines:

“ No one who has lived in the Himalayas would deny that it is the most godlike of all Himalayan trees. It stands erect, dignified, and though in a strong wind it may hum and sigh and moan, it does not bend to the wind. The snow slips softly from its resilient branches”.¹⁰

However, unlike Keats, Bond does not align the beauty of nature with the beauty of art. While his sensuousness leads to imagination, he finds himself incapable of gaining intellectual stimulus from the inanimate objects of art. He finds the wilting rose more vibrant than the Taj Mahal, which to him is nothing more than a cold, lifeless marble structure. This indifference to the artificial beauty of art prompts him to remark, “If someone were to ask me to choose between writing an essay on the Taj Mahal or the last rose of the summer, I’d take the rose—even if it was down to its last petal. Beautiful, cold, white marble leaves me—well, just a little cold”.¹¹

So during the cold winter months as the hills turn an arid brown, Bond undertakes long arduous walks through the crowded streets of Dehra to catch a glimpse of a garden alive with beautiful flowers. His joy knows no bounds when he discovers a small patch with a wild profusion of colourful flowers. His ecstasy is evident in the lines, “There were no sweet peas and the small fountain was dry. But around it, filling a large circular bed were masses of bright yellow California poppies.

They stood out like sunshine after the rain, and my heart leapt as Wordsworth's must have, when he saw his daffodils. I found myself oblivious to the sounds of the bazaar and the road, just as the people outside seemed oblivious to this little garden. It was as though it had been waiting here all the time, waiting for me to come and discover it".¹²

The landscape of Garhwal is all pervading in Bond's treatment of nature. It forms the background of most of his short stories. His affinity with the mountains of Garhwal stems from his lifelong familiarity with them. They are the only bridge between his present and his idyllic childhood. They provide him with a feeling of "limitless space" and immense freedom. His attachment for these mountains originates from his deep-rooted reverence for them and not because they provide him with inspiration for his writings. He candidly states that though, "the mountains are magic, let's face it, hill-stations are by now tawdry, tatty places, and Mussoorie is no exception. Tourism and private schools are its *raison d'être*. The odd writer has come this way but has usually hurried on elsewhere. I stayed on because of my personal reasons. It had nothing to do with my writing. Although I love to sit in the shade of a friendly chestnut tree, notebook on my knee, I can write just as well in a crowded railway compartment or a seedy hotel verandah—and have frequently done so".¹³

His unique tie with Garhwal has strengthened with time and has made Bond appreciate the tropical nature of the orient. Though English by birth, the writer's heart is enslaved by India. His brief stint in England makes him realize the intensity

of his love for the Garhwal hills and he longs to be back amidst the familiar landscape of his home. He inevitably compares the English landscape with the landscape of Musoorie and finds it wanting in all respects. In "These I Have Loved", he candidly states :

"Once we visited the garden at Kew and in a hot house, moist and smelling of the tropics, I remembered the East and some of the simple things I had known—a field of wheat, a stack of sugarcane, a cow at rest and a boy sleeping in the shade of a long, red fingered poinsettia---And I knew I would go home to India".¹⁴

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the void created by his father's untimely death augments young Ruskin's craving for love and affection. But contrary to expectation, he fails to find the emotional anchor amongst his own kith and kin. As we have seen, even his mother disappoints him by her superficiality and insensitivity. Like Wordsworth, he turns in desperation to the familiar nature of his home for emotional purgation, firm in his conviction that,

" Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her".¹⁵

His unwavering faith in nature is evident in the lines from "The Banyan Tree" wherein he states:

"I remember you well, old banyan tree
As you stood there spreading quietly

Over the broken wall.

While adults slept, I crept away

Down the broad verandah steps, around

The outhouse and the melon ground

Into the shades of afternoon

Those summers in India no one stirred

Till evening brought the Fever-bird

And the mem-sahibs rose with the Rising moon

In that June of long ago, I roamed

The faded garden of my father's home.

He'd gone away. There was nothing to do

And no one to talk to.....

I must have known giants have few friends

(The great lurk shyly in their private dens)

And found you hidden by a dark green

Wall of aerial roots.

Intruder in your pillared den I stood

And shyly touched your old rugged wood.

And as my hand explored you, giant tree

I heard you singing".¹⁶

As Bond turns to nature for succour, he is overwhelmed by her rapturous welcome. When he visits the pine-knoll after a lapse of several months he finds the trees dancing joyously to celebrate his home-coming. In "From A Small Beginning", he gives expression to their reaction in the lines:

"When the trees saw me, they made as if to turn in my directionThe trees remembered me. They bowed gently in the breeze and beckoned me nearer, welcoming me home".¹⁷

For Bond, the summer night spent in the pine-knoll becomes a salubrious experience. As he lies awake for long hours, savouring the sights and sounds, "listening to the chatter of the stream, the occasional tonk-tonk of the nightjar or watching through the branches overhead the stars turning in the sky",¹⁸ he is filled with a great sense of well-being. He returns to the pine-knoll again and again for peace and comfort.

Bond is akin to Wordsworth in his belief that there is essentially no difference between one form of life and the other. Like Wordsworth he too believes the spirit of nature is interlinked with the spirit of man. So he invests each natural object with such feelings and emotions that it acquires its own distinct identity and individualism. He accepts nature as his "guardian angel" and is convinced that so long as he is in her midst he will come to no harm.

In "Miss Bun And The Others" he identifies himself with the traveller who dreams of a clear mountain stream while dying of thirst in a parching desert. The vision of cool, sparkling water provides the dying man with spiritual sustenance. He recovers and sets out in search of the mountain stream of his dreams.

He discovers the spring in the course of a trek through the Himalayas and builds his permanent residence close to it. He is convinced that "as long as he remained by the spring, he would never feel unsafe; it was where his guardian spirit lived".¹⁹

Likewise Bond is reluctant to leave Garhwal as he is convinced that his "guardian spirit" dwells amidst the lofty Garhwal mountains. He makes his feelings clear when he remarks : "I feel safe near my own spring, my own mountain, for this is where my guardian spirit lives".²⁰

Bond has an inherent dislike for the city life. Like Baudelaire and T.S.Eliot, he feels the city has a torturing effect on the soul of man. The crowd and the noise make him apprehensive. Amidst the sea of humanity, he feels isolated and lost. He then yearns for the familiarity of his home in the hills and does not like to leave his native hills even for a brief period to pursue his work in the city. In "A Mountain Stream" Bond evinces his attachment for the Garhwal hills in the lines:

"There is a brook at the bottom of the hills. From where I live I can always hear its murmur, but I am no longer conscious of the sound except when I return from a trip to the plains.

And yet I have grown so used to the constant music of the water that when I leave it behind I feel naked and alone, bereft of my moorings. It is like getting accustomed to the friendly rattle of the tea cups every morning, and then waking one day to deathly stillness and a fleeting sense of panic”.²¹

Bond resembles Wordsworth again in his ability to recollect natural beauty in tranquillity. Beautiful scenes are captured and encased in his mind to provide him with pleasure and intellectual sustenance at a later date when the scenes are no more. When depressed or troubled he conjures up these natural scenes in his mind's eye. They become the manna of his soul and soothe his agitated mind. In “A Dream Of Gardens”, he envisages his grandmother's garden with its maze of flowerbeds and masses of flowers. The vision of this beautiful garden once owned by his family rejuvenates him and he longs for such a garden that is “spacious and gracious, and full of everything that's fragrant and flowering”.²² His feelings are apparent in the lines;

“I suppose it was this garden of my childhood that implanted in my mind the permanent vision of a perfect garden, so that whenever I am worried or down in the dumps, I close my eyes and conjure up a picture of this lovely place, where I am wandering through forests of cosmos and banks of rambling roses. It does help to soothe an agitated mind. I wouldn't call it meditation. Contemplation, rather”.²³

In “Coaxing A Garden From The Himalayan Soil”, while expounding the other benefits of owning a beautiful garden, Bond recollects how the ninety year old Annie Powell got up early each morning to water her flower-beds. Her

obsession with this early morning ritual stemmed from her belief that “ the flower and leaves glistening with water gave her a new lease of life every day”.²⁴

After their occasional fights, Bond’s grandparents would make their way to the center of their garden. The flowers and the vegetables always made them forget about their disagreements and encouraged them to launch into animated discussion. Bond’s humorous observation on the sobering effects of the garden is seen in the lines :

“Grandfather looked after the Orchard. Grandmother looked after the flower garden. Like all people who had lived together for many years, they had their occasional disagreement.

Grandfather would proceed to sulk on a bench beneath the jackfruit tree, while at the other end of the garden grandmother would start clipping a hedge with more than her usual vigour. Silently, imperceptibly they would make their way towards the vegetable patch. This was the neutral ground. My cousins and I looked on like U. N Observers. And there among the cauliflowers, conversation would begin again and the quarrel would be forgotten. There’s nothing like home grown vegetables for bringing two people together.

Red roses for young lovers. French beans for longstanding relationships”.²⁵

Bond is aware that a garden cannot solve all human problems, yet he is confident that “ a little digging and friendly dialogue with the good earth can help reactivate us when we grow sluggish”.²⁶ His personal experience proved that a

garden can also provide intellectual stimulus to a writer. He puts forward his views on the beneficial effects of the garden when he remarks :

“Whenever I’m 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”.²⁷

In the modern age of scientific advancement, every thing has been brutally rationalized. Bond hopes some mysteries of nature are left untouched by science. While he is very eloquent about nature, he is not unaware of nature’s violent facets that ^{are} highly inimical to man. Like Thomas Hardy, he realizes the immutability of nature and the mutability of human life. He is aware of the greatness of nature and the littleness of man. He is conscious of the relentless character of natural laws and man’s puny struggles to evade them.

So he is filled with apprehension when nature unleashes her fury on mankind. In “Listen To The Wind”, Bond dwells on the destructive facet of nature when he describes the Pari Tibba — a barren hill. It is devoid of life and dwellings as everything in this ill-fated hill has been repeatedly struck down by lightening and razed to the ground. Even the two lovers running away from society in search of their personal heaven are not spared. Nature connives with man to punish Robert and the young hill girl for flouting social norms and wrecks their happiness. During a stormy night, as the lovers take shelter in the ruins of the Pari Tibba, nature

singles them out for destruction and unleashes her fury on them. Their wishful dreams remain unfulfilled. They are struck down by lightening, charred and reduced to dust.

In “Sita And The River”, Bond presents another violent aspect of nature in the form of a mighty river in spate. Little Sita lives happily with her grandparents on a deserted island in the middle of a river. But serious illness compels her grandfather to evacuate his wife to the mainland hospital and the little girl suddenly finds herself all alone. Grappling with her loneliness, she is distressed by the sight of a terrible storm raging in the hills. Heavy rains in the hills cause the river to rise rapidly till it floods the plain and the island. Sita is confronted with the worst crisis of her life as she battles for survival against the flooded river.

In sheer desperation she seeks refuge in the branches of the old peepal tree in the hope that it would save her from the hungry river. She is perplexed by the sudden fury of the river she loved so dearly and wonders why it is now threatening her. Her bewilderment turns to terror when she sees the havoc caused by the river. Her horror and helplessness is apparent in the lines:

“Some thing went floating past the tree. Sita caught a glimpse of a stiff, upraised arm and long hair streaming behind on the water. The body of a drowned woman. It was soon gone, but it made Sita feel very small and lonely, at the mercy of great and cruel forces. She began to shiver and then to cry”.²⁸

As the river blazes a trail of destruction, the old peepal tree which had withstood many floods, loses its battle with thundering river. It loses its hold on the firm earth and like a defeated soldier falls into the river. Sita reposing her faith in the tree does not despair even in the face of this new peril. She is confident the old tree would protect her and ensure her safety. The little girl's unwavering faith in nature is apparent in the lines:

“And tree moved out on the river and the little island was lost in the swirling waters, Sita forgot her fear and her loneliness. The tree was taking her with it. She was not alone. It was as though one of the gods had remembered her after all.

The branches swung Sita about, but she did not lose her grip. The tree was her friend. It had known her all these years and now it held her in its old dying arms as though it were determined to save her from the river’.²⁹

From the branches of the tree, Sita observes a crow's nest being overturned and the eggs falling into the river. The mother crow flies desperately overhead cawing loudly, and hoping that her nest and some of her eggs would be saved. But in the end, she has to accept the inevitable. Like the mother crow, Sita too is now reconciled to her changed relationship with nature. As has already been mentioned in the Preface, Sita no longer feels any guilt that she is being punished by the gods for her past sins. She realizes that the angry river is not an instrument of God's wrath but only a manifestation of the duality of nature.

Like Sita , Bond cannot erase from his mind nature's bounteous essence by its contrary aspects. The destructive elements of nature rather deepen his respect for her.

So he cannot reconcile himself to the wanton destruction of nature as a result of man's insatiable thirst for wealth and power. He too feels like Wordsworth that God's

“..... most dreaded instrument

For working out a pure intent

Is Man arrayed for mutual slaughter”³⁰

Bond becomes a pagan in his nature worship as he is convinced that nature is not just a conglomeration of inanimate objects but “ a presence and a power, a spirit and a guide leading beyond itself”.³¹

In “Great Trees I Have Known” he nostalgically recalls the days in the past when nature was venerated as she occupied a special place in the minds and hearts of man. Early man's belief in dryads, naiads and nymphs dwelling in the trees led to their conservation as none dared felling trees for fear of incurring the wrath of the gods. But in modern times, the trees have fallen prey to man's lust for material aggrandizement. As a result even sacred groves have disappeared.

Bond attributes the cause of this new malady to man's total indifference to nature. Modern man has ceased to believe that trees and bushes are an integral part of life. Bond deplores this unhealthy attitude and projects his views in the lines:

“The trouble is, hardly anyone (with the exception of the contractor who buys the felled trees) really believes that trees and shrubs are necessary. They get in the way, so much don't they ? According to the milkman, the only useful tree is one which can be picked clean of its leaves for fodder! And a young man remarked to me , “You should come to Pauri. The view is terrific, there are no trees in the way”.”³²

Man has not confined himself to the destruction of trees alone. His greed has led him to ransack the bowels of the earth in search of metals and minerals. In “Dust In The Mountains”, young Bisnu is appalled by the destruction he witnesses as he approaches the limestone quarry where he goes with Chitru in search of employment. Through the blanket of dust he notices the mountain top blasted away by miners in their search for rich limestone. There is a deathly calm as birds and butterflies, flowers and shrubs have all disappeared. In a way he becomes Bond's spokesman when he voices his dismay at man's desecration of nature in the lines:

“There was a sharp crack of explosives and the hillside blossomed outwards. Earth and rock hurtled down the mountain. Bisnu watched in awe as shrubs and small trees were flung into the air. It always frightened him – not so much the sight of the rocks bursting asunder, as the trees been flung aside and destroyed. He thought of the trees at home – the walnuts, the chestnuts, the pines – and wondered that if one day they would suffer the same fate, and whether the mountains would all become a desert like this particular one. No trees, no grass, no water – only the choking dust of the mines and quarries”.”³³

Even the wild animals are not spared. Deprived of their natural habitats by the indiscriminate felling of trees and man's constant encroachment upon the forestland, they are relentlessly hunted for pleasure and profit. As a result the wildlife is on the verge of extinction. In many of his short stories Bond expresses anguish at this wanton killing of wild animals and stresses the need for their preservation.

In "The Leopard" he is filled with exhilaration when he comes across a leopard in the forest close to his home in Musoorie. He encounters this rare animal several times in course of his walks through the forest and develops a strange attachment for it. The leopard initially perplexed, acknowledges his presence "in the friendliest way" by ignoring him completely. Bond describes its reaction to his presence thus:

"It was not looking towards me, but had its head thrust attentively forward in the direction of the ravine. Yet it must have sensed my presence because it slowly turned its head and looked down at me. It seemed a little puzzled at my presence there, and when to give myself courage, I clapped my hands sharply, the leopard sprang into the thickets, making absolutely no sound as it melted into the shadows".³⁴

Bond's happiness turns to dismay when he finds a party of hunters chasing the leopard. They doggedly pursue it for its skin, which, he is told, is sold in Delhi for more than a thousand rupees.

His dismay turns to remorse, when the next day he sees the hunters emerging triumphantly from the forest carrying the lifeless body of the leopard, shot both in the head and neck. In a strange way he holds himself responsible for the death of this animal. Convinced that he had made the leopard “ confident, too confident, too careless, too trusting of the human in his midst”,³⁵ he is tormented by a feeling of guilt and cannot reconcile himself to its death. His anguish is apparent from his pathetic questions:

“ Did the leopard trusting one man make the mistake of bestowing his trust on others? Did I by casting out all fear--- my own fear and the leopard’s protective fear--- leave him defenseless ?”³⁶

While condemning this wanton killing of wild animals Bond cautions man against destroying nature and wildlife. He feels that one who destroys them, slowly destroys himself. His feelings are similar to the Red Indian Chief Seattle who, about a hundred and fifty years ago had warned the human race of the danger of desecrating the environment and wildlife thus:

“ What is man without beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.”³⁷

Man is becoming increasingly dehumanized as a result of deliberately snapping off his vital links with nature. His life is embroiled in senseless competitions for reaching superficial goals. His relentless striving for power and

self has made him emotionally bankrupt. So he frantically pursues fraudulent sadhus and spurious 'godmen' in the hope of attaining mental bliss. But it eludes him as the rituals intended for the uplift of his spiritual well-being are performed for the promotion of his selfish desires. Thus his acts of charity and benevolence performed for ensuring his prosperity, happiness and good health are mere fakes and in no way help him to achieve the mental tranquillity that he so desperately craves for.

Bond firmly believes the mental peace which eludes modern man, can be attained through careful observation and understanding of nature. He tries to impress upon man the need to pause a while and contemplate the beauty of nature, for beneath it are hidden the greatest truths of life. He urges the human race to inculcate patience, fortitude and tolerance by loving and respecting nature. Accordingly in "Silent Birth", he informs:

“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 that stillness within the tree

And silence within the root".³⁸

In "The Fern", he implores man to learn from nature the spirit of camaraderie and the ability to withstand hardships. Realizing his own fallibility, he invokes the Gods to bestow on him the patient strength of the maidenhair fern so that he can withstand all pressures and follow the right path. Thus he prays

"The slender maidenhair fern grows firm on a rock

While all around her the water swirls and chatters

And then disappears in a rush

Down to the bottom of the hill.

When I'm surrounded by troubled waters, Lord,

Let me find within a rock to cling to,

And give me the quiet patience of the maidenhair

Who has learned to live with the rock",³⁹

Bond's basic optimism however does not allow him to lose faith in the inherent goodness of man or of nature's power of rejuvenation. Though deeply

grieved by the ruthless destruction of the environment and wildlife, he is confident of life's capability of propagating itself.

His belief in this unique power of life is evident in 'Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright'. The old tiger, who lived in harmony with the villagers dwelling on the outskirts of the forest by the Ganges is forced to take a confrontationist path owing to sudden shortage of its natural prey. As the famished animal attacks the villagers' cattle it comes into direct conflict with their enraged owners. They hound him with guns, axes, spears and sticks till badly wounded he falls into the river. But the Ganges carries him away from the agitated villagers to a distant land where life was waiting for propagation. Bond's optimism comes to the fore in the lines :

“ as the river water oozed out of his mouth , and the warm sun made new life throb through his body , he stirred and stretched , and his glazed eyes came into focus . Raising his head, he saw trees and tall grass.

Slowly he heaved himself off the ground and moved at a crouch to where the grass waved in the afternoon breeze. Would he be harried again, and shot at? There was no smell of man. The tiger moved forward with greater confidence. There was however, another smell in the air—a smell that reached back to the time when he was young and fresh and full of vigour—a smell that he had almost forgotten but could never quite forget — the smell of a tigress!

He raised his head high, and a new life surged through his tired limbs. He gave a full-throated roar and moved purposefully through the tall grass. And the

roar came back to him, calling him, calling him forward—a roar that meant there would be more tigers in the land”.⁴⁰

Bond’s firm belief in the immutability of nature is again forcefully expressed in “My Father’s Trees In Dehra”. An avid conservationist, Aubrey Bond along with his young son often went beyond the river bed in Dehra, planting saplings, flowering shrubs and cuttings. During one such tree planting session, he told the impressionable young lad a beautiful story of how the trees once moved like man. But they are now rooted in one place due to a spell cast on them. He assured his son that one day the wicked spell would be broken and the trees would move again. Fascinated by the story, young Ruskin spent a very pleasant day with his father enthusiastically planting tamarind, laburnum and coral tree saplings and cuttings in a barren island in the middle of the river. Soon after, he had to part with his father to attend a boarding school. Three months later he received the shattering news of his father’s death.

Years later, Bond returns to Dehra again. By then his grandparents were dead, their house had been sold and he remained the sole surviving member of the family. While visiting his familiar childhood haunts, he instinctively makes his way towards the barren island nostalgically recalling the wonderful moments he had spent with his father there. As he reaches the island, he is amazed to find the once barren island covered with a thick forest and teeming with birds, insects and red coral blossoms. He recalls his father’s light-hearted prophecy made to a little boy

years ago. His father's prophecy has finally come true in this remote corner of the world. Ecstatically he declares:

"..... The trees seem to know me. They whisper among themselves and beckon me nearer. And looking around, I find that other trees and wild plants and grasses have sprung up under the protection of the trees we planted.

They have multiplied. They are moving. In this small forgotten corner of the world, my father's dreams are coming true, and the trees are moving again".⁴¹

This unique experience in Dehra accentuates Bond's conviction that so long as there are nature lovers like the bank Manager in "Trail To The Bank" or animal lovers like little Ramu (in "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright") or Kishen Singh, the railway watchman (in the "Tunnel") who at great personal risk tries to save endangered animals from being killed, there is " still hope for this old world".⁴²

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