

Revisiting Traditional Knowledge on Flora through the Lens of Ruskin Bond

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Abstract

Traditional knowledge refers to the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples developed from experience gained over the centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment, traditional knowledge is often transmitted orally from generation to generation. From ages, Plants have been used to treat various human ailments since times immemorial. Human beings are dependent on plants for their different needs. Plants provide us food, fodder, fuel, medicine, timbers, dyes, fibres, fruit etc. The traditional methods of using plants as medicines have played an important role in our ancient system of health care. Ruskin Bond's writings, especially, the short stories are storehouse of his exceptional knowledge about the trees and their medicinal worth. The Present paper tries to enumerate some trees and plants that Bond depicts in his works.

Keywords: plants, trees, medicinal, traditional knowledge, Ruskin Bond

Introduction:

Ruskin Bond, the most acclaimed short story writer was born and brought up in the foothills of Dehradun. His stories show his unquenchable love for nature, trees, the mountains and the flora and fauna of the Himalayas. It is quite amazing and amusing, how a litterateur can enlist innumerable names of animals, plants, trees, birds and even insects! His writings, especially, the short stories are storehouse of his exceptional knowledge about the trees and their medicinal worth. Trees have always played a significant role in Bond's life. He states that even at Landour "the trees stand watch over my day-to-day life. They are the guardians of my conscience. I have no one else to answer to, so I live and work under the generous but highly principled supervision of the trees – especially the deodars, who stand on guard, unbending, on the slope above the cottage." (Bond 121). Bond refers to the pine forests of the Himalayan region. He also mentions several other trees, like oak, cherries, eucalyptus,

jacaranda, laburnum, and bilberry trees in his short stories. Ruskin sometimes highlights the medicinal value of plants to mark their pre-eminence.

Ruskin Bond in *The Blue Umbrella* refers the cherry tree "a wild cherry tree growing crookedly out of the rocks and hanging across the chasm" (*The Blue Umbrella* 7). He describes a cherry tree that grows crookedly out of the rocks and hangs across the chasm. Binya, a character in the short story, climbs the tree as agile as mountain goat. A traditional knowledge about this tree tells us that, Cherries are packed with antioxidants and offer many health benefits including help with insomnia, joint pain. Cherries are good source of melatonin, which help to regulate our sleep cycles. Researchers have found that it can be consumed for weight management. The Alzheimer's Association includes cherries as one of the memory boosting foods because they are rich in antioxidants. Tart cherries provide cardiovascular benefits. The anthocyanins, that reduces the risk of high cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes, according research from the University of Michigan Health System. Cherries have the highest antioxidant level than any fruit. Lowers the risk of gout. Knowing all these medicinal benefits of cherries, Bond refers the cherry trees.

Bond narrates the pine forest of the Himalayan region throughout the story, *Blue Umbrella*. He shows the intimacy of Binya and cows with the pine trees. "Binya sat down in the shade of a pine tree" (*The Blue Umbrella* 6). Pine forests are the largest in the Indo-Pacific areas. It covers areas of India and also other countries like Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan. In India, the Himalayan subtropical pine forests stretch across the low hills of the Great Himalayan range. Pine tree are full of medicinal worth according to traditional knowledge, it is a daily dose of vitamin C or during colds, flus, or bronchitis to help loosen mucous and encourage productive coughing, while soothing the throat and lungs. The vitamin content and anti-bacterial action also help your body fight colds. Pine resin is highly anti-microbial and can be used to heal wounds or draw out foreign objects from the skin. It can be used internally as tincture to fight respiratory infections or colds. Pine resin oil or salve is safe for all ages and can be applied as a chest rub for respiratory colds. Pine is preferable for children, as eucalyptus and peppermint can be too intense. It is used to treat diseases resulting from nerve malfunction, neuralgic disorders and rheumatism.

The next tree that Bond refers is the Oak trees, "About four years previously, Bijju had knocked a hive out of an oak tree" (9), Oak trees are seen the temperate areas of the Himalayas. Indigenous people, in many areas of the world, use them as antiseptics and to treat gastrointestinal tract (GIT) disorders such as diarrhoea and haemorrhoids. They act as antioxidant, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, antidiabetic, hepatoprotective and cures skin disorders.

Bond mentions many trees in his short story "My Father's Trees in Dehra". He says, I have to walk only a furlong to reach my grandfather's house. "I have to walk only a furlong to reach my grandfather's house. The road is lined with eucalyptus, jacaranda and laburnum trees.". (36-45). The road is lined with eucalyptus, jacaranda and laburnum trees. The traditional medicine acknowledges Eucalyptus as to cure colds and respiratory problems, tooth ailments, and dental care, fungal infections, diabetes, bladder disorders and stimulating

immune system. Jacaranda species have also been used traditionally to treat venereal infections, gastrointestinal disorders, leishmaniasis, colds and rheumatism.

Ruskin Bond also refers to bilberries/European Blueberries in his story "Binya passes by". Bilberries are seen in the Himalayas too. The fruits of bilberries are juicy and sour. Bilberry are potent antioxidants that can strengthen blood vessels and capillary walls, improve red blood cells, stabilize collagen tissues such as ligaments and cartilage and has cholesterol lowering effects. In the past, dried bilberries have been used to treat diarrhoea because it acts as an astringent to gastro intestinal tract. In folk medicine, bilberry leaf has been used to treat a number of conditions including diabetes. Thus, the traditional knowledge enlists so many medicinal properties of the bilberry.

Conclusion

Bond thus, refers to all these trees in the context to reiterate the need to save the plants which are the potential for man's health. Knowledge on different uses of plants has been gathered by people over millennia and passed on orally from generation to generation. Knowledge developed over millennia by thousands of people is mostly unrecorded and it is facing a danger of becoming extinct with the increasing rate of deforestation and concurrent loss of biodiversity. He displays his knowledge of native plant varieties and weaves brilliant stories around it, often emphasising its worth for mankind. These plants are the source of treasures to lead a healthy life. He inspires the readers, particularly the younger generation, to plant these living treasures in their surroundings.

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