

## Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Select Short Stories of Ruskin Bond

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Ruskin Bond

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### Abstract

In all the nations of the world nature and literature have constantly shared intimacy and it is represented by the writers in their works. Now, literary critics are trying to understand how the relationship is incorporated in literature by the writers. Even though India is blessed with diverse ecosystem from the north to the south and from the east to the west, it is under threat due to the growing population and greed of human beings.

Ecology is another part of fiction that portrays the relationship of individuals and climate. The bond is perplexing to such an extent that any deviation in one can influence the other. Subsequently, concern for environmentalism is extraordinary compared to other discussed subjects these days and has become set up idea around the world. But Ecocriticism has gone through shifts in its methodology and course since its development. This paper attempts to analyse Ruskin Bond's short stories from the Pastoral Approach of Ecocriticism.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Pastoral approach, Ruskin Bond, Nature, Behaviour, Relationship,

### Introduction

Literature is well recognized by readers as it represents the present issues. It is full of works that deal with the ecstasy of nature. But the apprehension for ecosystem and the danger

that the Environment put forth on human race, freshly caught the consideration of the writers. This intellect has given scope to a new literary theory, which is Ecocriticism. 'Ecocriticism' is a word first presented in William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. But it stayed idle in critical terminology until the Western Literature Association meeting (in Loeur d' Alene) 1989.

At that period, Cheryll Glotfelty was a student and concentrated on the vocabulary and its usage in the field of literature which later became 'the study of nature writing'. At present he is an Assistant Professor of Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno. Glen Love who is a professor of English at the University of Oregon also supported the sound of 'ecocriticism' in WLA meeting. Then the practice of the word 'ecocriticism' has flourished. In his collection *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty elucidates:

"Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its readings of the texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies". (1996: xviii).

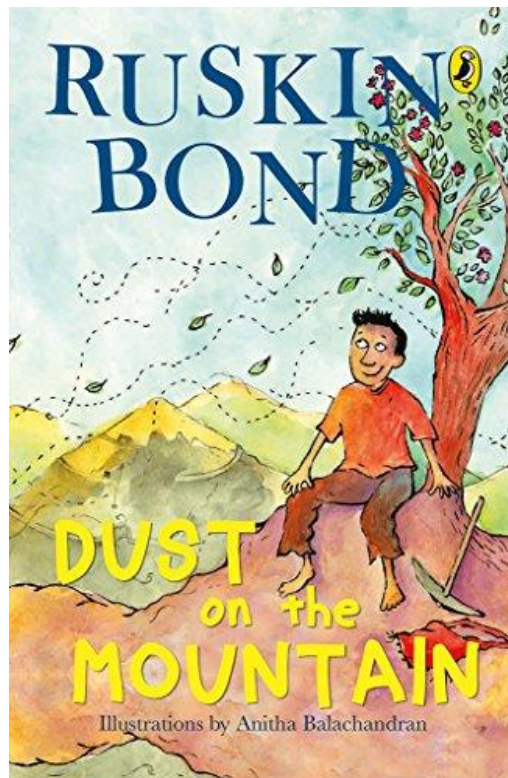
### **Pastoral Approach in Ruskin Bond's Stories**

In general, *pastoral* is associated with concepts like simplicity, charisma, serenity in country life, or description of rural people's nature and activities. Pastoral works represent dazzling view, merry shepherds, alluring pixies, country melodies and moves. Bond's short stories began from Dehradun district with delineation of backwoods, individuals around mountain runs, their traditions, and customs. Thus, his works are marked as writing with local shadings that weigh on the views and conduct of a regular Himalayan area. His accounts present both extraordinary and little things of the world. Appropriately, his short stories are a copy of society. Bond's greatness lies in the moderate depiction of scenery, customs, and attitudes of the society. He also represents sensitive moods like desire, greed, departure, agony, sympathy, and virtuousness in his stories. His characters grab the attention of readers for their closeness to reality. He even addresses delicate states of mind like longing, eagerness, flight, misery, compassion, and excellence in his accounts. His characters grab the attention of readers for their closeness to the real world.

Bond's philosophy understands the spirit in plants and animals. The glorious depiction of pastoral component in his short stories is a guide to consider him a Natural Author. Nature is an overwhelming topic in his works and his compositions are adages of average folks. His accounts offer an answer not exclusively to the issue of hero yet in addition to the reader. In a large portion of his accounts, characters discover comfort in nature like the author. He has a significant relationship with Dehradun and the environmental factors of Uttarakhand as he remained there for quite a while. Human beings cannot separate themselves from their sense of belonging. Environment has played a major role in modeling the nature of Sita and the other

characters in Bond's stories. Ruskin Bond and Wright make a comparison between harmony of trees and immoral behaviors of human beings. Ruskin Bond as an environmentalist does not like mechanical worship and expresses sincere gratitude to the Almighty for giving a chance to associate with nature. He feels alienated whenever life deploys him from the lands of Northern India. Man lives near nature in specific spots, as Bond says in his Book of Nature.

“Living in the hills, or near the great forests, or near the sea, does, of course, makes it easier to engage with the natural world. At every bend the entire vista is altered, and our perspective changes too. When we walk close to nature, we come to a better understanding of life; for it is from the natural world that we first emerge and to which we still belong’. (Bond: 1988: 60).



Courtesy: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

In most of his stories, Dehra is set as a location because he stayed there with his grandparents. We find first person narrative technique in most of his stories. *Dust on the Mountains* is a collection of stories written by Bond. Bond in the short story *In Creatures Great and Small*, states:

“Instead of having brothers and sisters to grow up with in India, I had as my companions an odd assortment of pets, which included a monkey, a tortoise, a python, and a Great Indian Hornbill. The person responsible for all this wildlife was my grandfather.” (Bond: 2009: 147).

He goes on to narrate in great detail about the interesting life led by him in this household. A pair of Great Danes, who had to be given away because of their “enormous appetites”, gave young Bond rides on their backs. Toto, the monkey was full of mischief. When Toto was left to catch the mice in the larder, he finished off grandmother’s homemade jams. Grandfather next came home with a four-foot-long python curled around his neck. The python loves the dressing table, “enamored of his own reflection” (152), and ultimately a cage with a mirror is prepared for him. Buffaloes and frogs in the pond were a source of fun to Ramu. Grandfather says:

“It is also important that we respect them”, said grandfather.” We must acknowledge their rights. Everywhere birds and animals are finding it difficult to survive, because we are trying to destroy both them and their forests. They have to keep moving as the trees disappear.” (Bond: 2009 :156).

In his childhood he nurtured abundant love for nature, and he added it in his stories as a background. As his mind is packed with pastoral element of his childhood, he constantly suggests it to the reader through his short stories.

*The Tiger in the Tunnel* is a small poignant story of a night watchman. His work is to see whether the tunnel is clear or not without any obstruction. Baldeo is very much happy for the job he got. He feels that he can feed his child a full meal with the salary he gets. Here Bond describes the pathetic condition of their tribal village which is located on the outskirts of the forest. Tembu is the irresponsible child of the Baldeo. One day Baldeo observed the signal light condition and drag the chain of lamp to set right. If the problem is lack of the oil, he would have to walk three miles all the way to the hut to fetch more. As he was preoccupied with tension, he heard an animal’s roar from nearby. Baldeo is now worried as to it was moving towards the tunnel or in the direction of the hut, in which the child would lie undefended. But within one minute the tiger advanced towards him. Baldeo fought with the tiger and injured the tiger, but he was slayed by it unfortunately. Now, Tembu along with his family plunged in grief for some days, but life is a cycle it had to continue its journey for the rest. After three days Tembu stood as a watchman at the tunnel. Bond touches our emotions by the heart-breaking final scene of the story. Tembu is now ready to face any threat or menace; if he had fear in mind he wouldn’t come to the tunnel to take his father’s axe and duty. The axe in Tembu’s hand becomes a sign of devotion towards occupation and stands as a symbol of everlasting war of man against forces of nature.

Bond’s eco-friendly story *My Father’s Trees in Dehra* relates his second visit to favourite place Dehra after a long time. Dehra is known for its peaceful landscape and splendid greenery. His father planted many trees and spent his life joyfully among them. Bond observed once a tendril plant sliding from his side and moved towards his father’s feet like his friend on the steps of veranda. Bond’s father interestingly planted trees even around the woodlands of Dehra. He recalls his father’s hands that are all the time busy planting trees.

“Armed with cuttings and saplings”, into the jungle, “planting flowering shrubs between the sal and sheesham trees.” (Bond:1988 :145).

His father had stated:

“If people keep cutting trees, instead of planting them, there’ll soon be no forests left at all, and the world will be just one vast desert. “The young Bond spends an entire day, planting trees on a small rocky island, and his father tells him that the trees used to move. and they will move again. “See how they reach out with their arms.” (Bond: 1988 :145).

Bond’s father passed away within three months of planting trees and Bond was sent to a boarding school. After that he moved to Britain and spent quite a while there. When he came to India, he is the unparalleled individual from the family in the country. He recalls his dad sayings in isolation:

“They’ve been standing still for thousands of years. There was a time which they could walk about like people, but someone cast a spell on them and rooted them to one place. But they’re always trying to move – see how they reach out with their arms!” (Bond:1988:145).

As he moved across the dry watercourse, his eyes caught the spectacular red plumes of the coral blossom. In contrast to that on the other side he observed dry rocky riverbed. And he appreciates the trees have sprung up under the protection of the trees they planted. Trees seem to know him but a koel – bird challenges him with a rising tone “who – are – you, who – are – you... (Bond: 1988:146). Finally, he says “my father’s dreams are coming true, and the trees are moving again”.

Ruskin Bond analyses condition of Terai forests in the story *Copperfield in the Jungle* and expresses disinterest of hunting in the jungle with guns. Through this touching story Bond informs about pitiable conditions of nature and animals. Bond in his story *Dust on the Mountains* focuses on the theme of exploitation of nature for utilitarianism. He writes:

The skeletons of a few trees remained on the lower slopes. Almost everything had gone grass, flowers, shrubs, birds, butterflies, grasshoppers, and ladybird. A rock lizard popped its head out of a crevice to look at the intruders. Then, like some prehistoric survivor, it scuttled back into its underground shelter. (Bond: 2009:496)

Bond became the ultimate environmentalist, growing up so in Dehra, with a father and grandfather who are close to nature and who protected both plant and animal life in the region. Planting trees is necessary, and it is the moral duty of man to nurture this love of trees and



impart it to their children. This is going beyond one's own garden, and beautifying the world at large, and creating shelter for birds, butterflies, and animals, is the largesse that Bond gives out to the world.

Ruskin Bond's greatness lies in the characterization that shows typical interdependent relationship between the natural world and human beings' misconceptions. He succeeds in representing the actuality of human sentiment and the changes in individual perception in the fight towards individuality. Bond initiates a state of awareness that plays a vital role in changing the human mind and false prestige as he considers that a theme has to disclose the inward authenticity of a character in order to stand as an ideal one. Bond's protagonists act genuinely but witness disastrous events in life, not as a consequence of rivalry, but for their own uncontrollable emotions. He discloses that human deeds like sin or sense of guilt act as triggers of transformation in their future. Though the theme of depression is recurrent in most of his stories, he also presents hope as a tool for success.

*Death of the Trees* reveals Bond's worry about the pitiable conditions of nature by the cruelty of human beings. In this story he sketches the treachery of human beings on the trees and roads. He says:

“Twenty oaks have been felled. Just in this small stretch near the cottage. By the time this bypass reaches Jabarkhet, about six miles from here, over a thousand oaks will have been slaughtered, besides many other fine trees – maples, deodars and pines – most of them unnecessarily, as they grew some fifty to sixty yards from the roadside”. (Bond: 1991 : 93-94).

He laments as an Environmentalist for the scenario of forest birds, as human beings are destroying their shelters. The trees that he lived with for more than ten years are being killed by PWD, and the truck of his brother. He even says the explosions are continually shattering the silence of the mountains, as thousand- year- old rocks are dynamited, frightening even the most valiant of birds and animals. Sound of dynamite has scared away the other animals too. But the writer ends the story with a ray of hope. “Men come and go, the mountains remain.” (Bond: 94)

The hero of the story *Bus Stop Pipalnagar* expresses his joy of touching the earth. His sensuous touch of the earth and grass is clearly depicting the writer's opinion. Through the protagonist, Bond focuses on the scenario of the Pipalnagar. The clear-cut exposures of things in the house reveal the pathetic conditions of villagers. The hero woke up in the morning with a stiff back due to the bed strings. Apart from the boys of teashop no one would dare to sleep outside.

“Apart from them there were lizards on the walls and ceilings –friends these- and a large rat – definitely an enemy –who got in and out of the window and who sometimes carried away manuscripts and clothing”. (Bond: 1988 :59).

Bond, in his stories repetitively writes about the risk and pollution of natural resources. The planned destruction of trees on mountain slopes in the name of progress and development is the theme in many of his stories. The story *Dust on the Mountains* narrates how money-mongers lure hill simpletons. The story unravels the sordid picture of 'green' massacre:

“There were trees here once, but the contractors took the deodars for furniture. And the pines were trapped to death for resin, and the oaks were stripped off their leaves to feed cattle”. (Bond: 291: 1990).

In this story, Bond designed a boy called Bisnu, and exposed his endless love for trees. The Environment changed a lot due to the deforestation. The consequence of that is noticed by Bisnu's mother in the story. This situation affects severely the monsoon of that region. Here, the writer unleashes another reason for the climatic changes, that is, negligent attitude of human beings to the planted trees. The campers make a fire and forget to down it as they leave. The writer himself experienced the gentleness on the hills of the Himalayas since his childhood which enabled him to become a supporter of nature. His experiences and people's behaviour deeds of human beings are unfolded in most of his stories. Being a true lover of wildlife and natural creatures, he wants to defend them from the explosion of human beings.

At present, eco-critics inspire writers to work on the ecological issues to suggest remedial methods through literature. The similar approach in the hands of Ruskin Bond has taken a new form. We can find explorations of most of his protagonists in wilderness and finally, their expedition ends with pleasure. In most of his stories, lovely Himalayas and Mussorie establish the background and the setting reveals his love and faith in the soothing powers of nature. The alarming state of nature was not a comfortable one for any nature lover and especially we find this version in Bond's stories. Though considerable emphasis was given to save the trees, the actual implementation is neglected by both the people and the society. Ruskin Bond exhibits his worry through the protagonists' susceptibility.

## Conclusion

Ruskin Bond clearly states that human beings can progress only with the help of nature, otherwise their progress lands in vain. In his writings we can find constant images and recurrent themes and through writings he leaves an open message to the readers of the world. Bond's themes are of a surprising and pleasant variety. His creative world has been built around plots drawn from love, pets, animals, orphans and disabled children, Indianness, nature and contemporary life. Bond's thematic base is the landscape and social milieu of the region that he frequented in his early years molded by his experience. He establishes a correlation between nature and humans. The locale chosen for the stories is recognizably Indian. They either add to our knowledge of life or give us a fresh, sweetly qualified, and vividly dramatized ideas. The tone of Bond's stories is moral and didactic. Nature is a major thematic occupation in Bond's short stories. He emphasizes on the great affinity between trees and men. It is not simply a

matter of nature description as a narrative technique, but a genuine feeling for the natural world, which has a Wordsworthian quality about it, making him an environmentalist writer.

This article presents a conclusion arguing for a prominent place to Ruskin Bond in Green literature and attempts to outline the characteristics of environmentalist writers in Indian context. In conclusion, it can be said that the term “Ecological Indian Writer” is really appropriate to Ruskin Bond, in addition to being a promoter of modern feminism as his women characters play different roles like a traditional wife, innocent mother, sweet lover, caring sister and many others.

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