

## ECOCRITICISM IN THE WORKS OF RUSKIN BOND

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**Abstract:** The development of modern civilization endows humans with all amenities. The gradual urbanisation unfolds many opportunities and makes life more comfortable. But at the same time it snatches away the beauty of the green world making life prone to various diseases, and resulting in the jeopardy of ecological balance. Ecocriticism has turned a new vista in re-evaluating our attitude towards the world. It focuses on the shift from anthropocentric to biocentric attitude as major critics of ecocriticism accentuate. Ruskin Bond (b.1934) has performed a major role in arousing environmental and ecological concerns through his plethora of literary creations. He delineates the harmonious coexistence of man and nature in his oeuvre, where panthers and humans live in mutual trust, where the unnoticed objects of natural world have their significant roles to perform in the exquisite design of God. This paper investigates ecocritical readings of selected stories by Ruskin Bond who is a notable Indian writer and has a strong attachment to nature. Ecocriticism, as a relatively new literary mode of inquiry, explores the relationship between literature and the environment, and how such narratives present ecological issues and the relationship between humans and nature. Bond's stories are set in the Indian rural areas with the Himalayas as the backdrop, where nature is more than a backdrop but an actively participating force in the characters' lives. This essay concerns itself with such stories as 'The Cherry Tree', 'The Blue Umbrella', and 'Dust on the Mountain' which portray the themes of environmental concerns, dependence of rural ecosystems on modernization etc, and the holistic view of nature and humans' moral duty to protect the environment. The stories related to Bond tend to take a more environmentally aware tone, accentuating the elegance, intricacy, and vulnerability of natural landscapes and taking a critical stance on the impacts exerted by industrialization and urbanism. The way Bond represents nature as nourishing but unconcerned, along with the intimate relationships his characters establish with their environment, emphasizes the need for nature conservation. This paper adopts an ecocritical stance and suggests that Bond's works promote the necessity of respecting and achieving a balance between humans and nature in the context of his own lived experience

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### Introduction:

Bond often hints at our ethical reassessment towards nature. Ruskin Bond is an ardent admirer of nature. His traumatic childhood – his mother's separation from his father and his father's sad demise at an early age of the author – finds its refuge in the soothing lap of nature. Nature always rejuvenates the writer and also liberally renders the source material for his writings. To evaluate Bond in the light of ecocriticism it would be pertinent to trace out his relationship with nature. Nature is not only a decorum for his artistic purpose, it is a perennial source of inspiration, “a guardian spirit in his loneliness and a transcendental celestial existence in the later period which culminates in his humanism with the world of flora and

fauna”(Sen,176 ), and finally it is “ his religion” (Pathak) also. In today's world of mass urbanisation and industrialisation Bond's works lead us to the alleys of vernal wood, or to a pristine meadow where we can take a lungful of fresh air, or to a little hamlet where panthers and humans are not in rancor with each other. His deep understanding of the natural world lies in his empathy towards it. Like a biologist he is not a detached observer of nature.

Literary scholars have drawn attention to ecocriticism as a significant trend today, given the fact most discussions today focus on environmental issues and global warming. It is intended to study the interaction, or disconnection of literature and literary texts with nature, and understand the role of the creator in

relation to the ecology. In fact, ecocriticism not merely studies the role of nature in literature but also investigates the representation of nature in literature and the role of literature in creating sensitivity towards environment and the role of mankind as caretaker of nature. In this regard, it is relevant to turn to the works of Ruskin Bond, one of the Indian authors who is known for his love of nature and originality, who can be of great importance for ecocriticism. The backdrop of his works, the beautiful and vulnerable nature of the Himalayas, and the places where all the action takes place, are home to nature where discrimination between man and nature does not take place. Ruskin Bond over the years has evolved as a literateur especially drawing inspiration from the scenes, flora and fauna around him. His works are not mere stories of people's life, rather every story revolves around a place struggling to find its identity from the people. It could be in the form of a kid planting trees or villagers maturing with the turn of seasons in the mountains, it seems that Bonds takes great pleasure in placing the emphasis on the interpersonal relationship with the land. The way he describes nature does not fit with an unachievable ideal or a fuzzy notion in the clouds, rather nature is force that directs, governs, and even controls the characters in his narratives. Such a view would appear as congruent to ecocriticism that says nature is not a background to human activity, but is part of the activity itself. One of the key elements of Bond's stories is their focus on the intricate balance between human life and the environment. His characters, often living in rural or semi-urban settings, exist in close harmony with nature. This harmony, however, is frequently portrayed as delicate and under threat, particularly in the face of modernization and industrialization. In stories such as *Dust on the Mountain* and *The Tiger in the Tunnel*, Bond emphasizes the tension between the natural world and human expansion, drawing attention to the environmental degradation that accompanies unchecked development. Through these narratives, Bond subtly critiques the exploitation of natural resources, offering a commentary on the need for sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. Bond's emphasis on kids and their relationship with environment is another important element of his writing that fits with ecocritical

viewpoints. Bond presents children as being more sensitive to nature than adults in tales like *The Cherry Tree*. An underlying message about the value of cultivating an early awareness for the environment is frequently conveyed by this relationship between kids and nature. Bond's young heroes often exhibit awe and interest about their surroundings, signifying optimism for a time when people and the natural world will live in harmony. This emphasis on kids and the environment can be seen from an ecocritical perspective as a plea for environmental education and the development of ecological awareness in the next generation. In summary, because of their deep involvement with nature, environmental challenges, and the relationships between humans and nature, Ruskin Bond's stories provide a wealth of material for ecocritical analysis. His art blends subtle environmental campaigning with storytelling, reflecting a profound ecological concern. Bond highlights the value of ecological preservation in a world increasingly threatened by environmental disasters by provoking readers to consider their own relationship with the environment through his nuanced portrayals of the natural world. His tales serve as a reminder that people are inextricably related to the ecosystems that support life on Earth and are not distinct from it.

#### **Theoretical Foundations of Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism is a branch of literary studies that deals with the politics of ecologies in literature and analyses the ecological dimensions in its narratives. The approach took shape in the late 20th century and was considerably expanded in 1996, thanks to 'The Ecocriticism Reader' by Cheryl Glotfelty which became the hallmark text of the discipline. Who possesses ecocriticism at the kernel of its birth? To an ecocritic, that kinetic environment is the sustainable framework within which narratives and lives take shape. An essential principle to ecocriticism is biocentrism which advocates for the equal balance of all living things, as opposed to anthropocentrism which sees man as the greatest being in nature. An ecocentric worldview is equally important, this is the belief that ecosystems are valuable in and of themselves, rather than just for what they can provide for people. This paradigm does not support conventional literary criticism that ignores or belittles nature for what it stands for,

and instead takes the position of how such ecological factors determine the plot, the characters, and the ideas of the themes of the story. 2.2 Human-Nature Relationship in Literature Historically, literature has long engaged with the natural world, though often from an anthropocentric perspective, where nature is depicted as either a resource to be exploited or an obstacle to be overcome. In earlier periods, particularly during the Enlightenment, nature was often portrayed as something that needed to be controlled or tamed by human reason and technology. This dualistic view, separating humans from nature, is a key issue ecocriticism seeks to address. In the context of Indian literature, particularly in the works of Ruskin Bond, the human-nature relationship is depicted with a profound sense of reverence and interconnectedness. Bond's stories are often set in the Himalayan foothills, where the natural landscape is intricately woven into the lives of the characters. His narratives reflect a deep ecological awareness, portraying nature not just as a setting but as a living entity with which humans interact and depend upon. Bond's stories highlight the fragility of ecosystems and the need for harmonious coexistence, themes that resonate with the ecocentric focus of ecocriticism.

#### **Nature as a Living Presence**

In Ruskin Bond's stories, nature is not merely a passive backdrop; it often takes on the role of an active, living presence that influences the narrative as much as any human character. Bond's intimate portrayal of the natural environment, particularly the Himalayan foothills, imbues nature with a sense of life, agency, and autonomy. Through vivid descriptions, Bond evokes a landscape that breathes, grows, decays, and evolves, reflecting the rhythms of life itself. This treatment of nature aligns with the ecocritical perspective, which emphasizes the vitality of the non-human world and challenges the anthropocentric viewpoint that reduces nature to a mere resource or setting. In *The Cherry Tree*, for instance, the cherry tree planted by Rakesh becomes a central figure in the story. As it grows, the tree symbolizes renewal, resilience, and the passage of time. Bond's detailed descriptions of the tree's gradual growth, its vulnerability to external threats, and its eventual blooming highlight nature's cyclical processes of

regeneration. The cherry tree is more than a symbol; it embodies the persistence of life in the face of adversity, mirroring the resilience of nature itself. This portrayal encourages readers to see nature as an active participant in the story, rather than a passive backdrop. Similarly, in *The Blue Umbrella*, the natural landscape of the hills is described with such precision that it seems to pulse with life. The mountains, forests, and streams become characters in their own right, shaping the experiences of the human characters and influencing the course of the narrative. Bond's treatment of the environment in this story reflects an ecocentric worldview, where nature's autonomy and agency are acknowledged. This aligns with the ecocritical approach, which seeks to understand how literary texts portray nature as more than just a human construct.

#### **Sustainability and Preservation of Ecosystems**

Ruskin Bond's stories often reflect a deep environmental consciousness, emphasizing the importance of sustainability and the preservation of natural ecosystems. Bond's settings, particularly in the Himalayan region, showcase a fragile environment under constant threat from human activities such as deforestation, industrialization, and unsustainable agricultural practices. His narratives subtly advocate for the protection of these natural spaces, underscoring the need for a balance between human development and environmental preservation. Through characters like Bishnu, who remain connected to the natural world despite the pressures of modernization, Bond emphasizes the value of traditional knowledge and sustainable living. These characters serve as a reminder that human survival is intricately linked to the health of the ecosystems they inhabit. In this sense, Bond's work aligns with the ecocritical emphasis on the necessity of preserving biodiversity and maintaining ecological harmony. Similarly, in *The Cherry Tree*, Bond's focus on the simple act of planting and nurturing a tree serves as a metaphor for environmental stewardship. The tree's growth over time mirrors the care and attention needed to sustain ecosystems, making it a powerful symbol of environmental preservation. Through these stories, Bond implicitly calls for a reconnection with nature,

advocating for small but meaningful actions that contribute to long-term sustainability.

### **Symbiotic Relationship Between Humans and Nature**

Ruskin Bond's works consistently reflect a deep recognition of the interdependence between humans and nature. In many of his stories, the human characters are shown to be intrinsically connected to the natural environment, with their lives, emotions, and actions influenced by the rhythms of the natural world. This symbiotic relationship aligns with the ecocritical perspective that human beings are not separate from nature but rather a part of a larger ecological system that requires balance and mutual respect. In *The Cherry Tree*, for example, Rakesh's connection to the tree becomes symbolic of the broader human-nature relationship. Just as the tree depends on him for protection and care, Rakesh, in turn, finds meaning and purpose through his relationship with the tree. This mutual dependence reflects the idea that humans and nature thrive together, each influencing the other in a continuous cycle of growth and sustenance. Bond's depiction of this symbiotic relationship emphasizes the idea that human well-being is inextricably linked to the health of the natural world. This interconnectedness also manifests in Bond's portrayal of the consequences of environmental degradation. When nature suffers, so too do the human characters, as seen in stories like *Dust on the Mountain*. The destruction of the forest and the pollution of the land lead to economic hardship, social dislocation, and emotional turmoil for the villagers. Through these narratives, Bond underscores the profound impact that environmental damage has on human communities, further emphasizing the importance of maintaining a healthy and balanced relationship with nature.

### **Conclusion :**

Ruskin Bond's storytelling intricately weaves together themes of nature, identity, and ecological awareness, presenting a profound ecocritical perspective that resonates with contemporary environmental concerns. Through his vivid depictions of landscapes and the intimate relationships between his characters and the natural world, Bond invites readers to reflect on their connections to the environment and the responsibilities that accompany them. His exploration of themes such as

interconnectedness, biodiversity, and the impact of modernity encourages a deeper understanding of the ecological realities shaping our lives. Overall, Bond's narratives serve as a call to action, urging readers to cultivate a sense of stewardship towards the natural world. By embracing the principles of ecocriticism, we can better appreciate the significance of preserving our environment and recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, Bond's stories remind us of the beauty and resilience of nature, inspiring us to protect the landscapes that shape our identities and communities.

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