

Man and Nature: The Everlasting Bond

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Abstract

Interdependent relationship between man and nature in Ruskin Bond's short stories can be come across. Emphasis is given to the protection of animals and trees. He exhorts man to return to the lap of nature. The stories are powerful enough to stimulate and inspire children towards nature. It is important for all to be aware of ecocriticism as a movement in literature. The author highlights the human threats to nature like deforestation and quarry mining. Village life brings contentment and the people derive joys out of nature. Nature becomes a character in Ruskin Bond's stories. This study focuses on the relationship between man and nature and the need to enlighten children about preservation of nature through literature.

Keywords: Nature, Ecocritism, Children, Ecology, Eco-conscious.

In a multilingual nation like India, the hardships faced by the rural people and the tribals are grave issues to be comprehended by all. Similarly, ecology and conservation of wild life are gaining importance on a global scale. Ecology deals with the relationship between organisms and their environment and concern for ecology is to be given top priority. There has always been a close relationship between nature and literature all over the world. Bond, a true artist, like an ascetic, sees the vision of paradise in the sunlight and green of the earth, in the

beauty of the human face and the wealth of human life even in objects that are apparently insignificant. Nature, life, sense, forms, love and the secret of the divine power are therefore the key words to his credo as a writer. By painting the Himalayan landscapes and unveiling the hearts of the hill folk, their small towns and bazaars, Bond recreates Indian ethos and presents his love of man and Nature as the strong religion of his life. He has produced great literature of universal significance, serving as a window to the realities of life and world; as an aperture through which the sights and colours, both strange and familiar are to be perceived in relative tranquility. In this age of science fiction, crime fiction and thrillers, he has extended an uncorrupted world of simple but delightful and absorbing stories narrating life in a new healing order.

Environment includes all living and non- living beings and it plays a very significant role in human civilization. We live in the environment and use the environmental resources like air, land and water to meet our needs. Development also means meeting the needs of the people. While meeting the ever-growing needs of humans, we pressurise the environment. When the pressure exceeds the carrying capacity of the environment to repair or replace itself, it creates a serious problem of environmental degradation. Therefore, there is a need to create awareness about environmental protection. Promoting environmental awareness will create a brighter future. A child has no necessary connection with nature, no experience or understanding of it, so it is presumed that the elders make the children aware of their natural surroundings. Environmental education should begin during the formative years of life. Such experiences play a crucial role in shaping life-long attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior towards natural environments. Even though, there are many media available in the modern world, children always have a great fascination to stories. Therefore, many writers have attempted to present the interdependent relationship between man and nature, man's cruelty to nature and its after effects through their short fiction in order to make the reader eco-conscious. Ruskin Bond is one among them. Nature is an omnipresent character in most of his works. He

is an ardent follower of nature like his child protagonists. Bond's basic mission in his stories is to emphasize the friendly relationship between man and nature.

Ecocriticism is comparatively a new theory of analyzing any literary text where the writer knowingly or unknowingly makes the readers understand the value of ecology and environment as evidenced in literature. It is a worldwide emergent movement coined by William Rueckert in 1978 and popularized by Cheryll Glotfelty in 1990s. 'Ecocriticism' was a term coined in the late 1970s by combining "criticism" with a shortened form of "ecology" – the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats. 'Ecocriticism' designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on the environment by human activities.

In the twentieth century the warnings by scientists and conservationists increased. By the latter part of the century there was a widespread realization that the earth was in an environmental crisis, brought on by the industrial and chemical pollution of the "biosphere", the depletion of forests and of natural resources, the relentless extinction of plant and animal species, and the explosion of human population beyond the capacity of the earth to sustain it. It was in this climate of crisis, or even imminent catastrophe, that ecocriticism was inaugurated. Eco critical writings oriented toward heightening their reader's awareness. Eco- critics are impelled by the conviction that what is at stake in their enterprise is not only the well-being but ultimately the survival of the human race. There has always been a close relationship between nature and literature all over the world. Kumari Shikha tries to analyze how the writers have developed this theme in their works. In her essay, "Eco criticism in Indian Fiction", she says that literature dealing in contemporary issues cannot remain unaffected from this theme:

The world of literature throngs with works dealing with beauty and power of nature. However, the concern for ecology and the threat that the continuous

misuse of our environment poses on humanity has only recently caught the attention of the writers. It is this sense of concern and its reflection in Literature that has given rise to a new branch of literary theory, namely Eco criticism. (1)

Ruskin Bond occupies an outstanding position among the contemporary Indian English writers. He is an Indian author of British descent, a living legend portraying life and experiences through various genres of literature. Ruskin Bond is also considered as a pioneer of children's literature in India. His children's stories, whether autobiographical or semi-autobiographical, expressed his longing for a happy childhood. He likes children because they are more frank, open minded and emotional. Through writing children's stories, he also fulfilled his own unfulfilled wishes and longings as a child. Bond focuses on entertaining young readers. The short stories of Bond provide an opportunity for the children to have the attraction towards the natural environment. Ruskin Bond has published many short stories for children in magazines and newspapers in India and abroad, but he started to write regularly for children when he shifted from Delhi to Mussoorie.

Writing from the unique position of being an ardent lover of nature, Ruskin Bond has been able to capture the delight in running with the winds, smiling with the flowers and conversing with the trees. He felt nature always welcoming his steps. Ruskin Bond is one writer whose works show ecology as an important theme. His concern for the thoughtless actions of man towards nature and the importance of nature in our lives is seen in his stories. He has always emphasized on the friendly relationship between man and nature and has brought before us our need for each other. That's why we notice his pity for the unsympathetic and cruel actions of human beings towards nature.

At the dawn of the new millennium, the whole globe is facing serious ecological crises like global warming, resource shortage in large number, rainforest destruction, and species etc. We are aware of the increasing responsibility of literature towards combating these environmental hazards through Ecocriticism. There is an utmost need today that the children

must be made aware regarding the present state, protection and preservation of the environment. Along with other subjects in the school curriculum working for nature, literature and ecocriticism have their unique functions. Eco-literature can motivate the children to get engaged with the environment and develop their knowledge of environmental concepts. They breathe life into concepts that are perceived to be dead in the textbooks. Therefore, it is very significant to analyse the effectiveness of children's literature in promoting eco-consciousness. Ruskin Bond's stories are relevant anytime to infuse the spirit of eco-consciousness in readers. Hence children are an indispensable part and these stories are abundant with love of nature, conserving animal and plant life. Man finds nature indispensable. Human beings have to travel back towards nature and strive together for an eco-friendly culture. This effort, when undertaken by Ruskin Bond has left everyone spellbound. His stories tell us how nature can be a shield and a shelter making us complete. The stories are powerful enough to drastically change anyone's outlook.

Bond, an apparent idealist, tries to see the best in everything and everyone. Tales about everyday life are the focus of Bond's work, not social issues. The only social issue he writes about is nature. His stories are about everyday life, light hearted and humorous. His child characters are very adventurous, humble, good at heart and yet tough and strong willed. They are Indian to the very core. His stories for the young children are generally set in a small isolated Himalayan town or village which still remain its inherited values of basic honesty, faith and love for the family and neighbours.

The Road to the Bazaar is an anthology of stories that is centered on Dehra, the hometown and backdrop of Ruskin Bond's stories. The playful moments are seen through the eyes of Koki, Suraj, Ranji, Amir, Teju and Mukesh – the kids of Dehra. Every short story in this collection unveils the simplicity of hill side life. A world of fun and enchantment is created which brings out the hidden child in the reader. The stories describe the simple joys and sorrows of childhood, where the only worries are associated with the desire to be on the cricket team,

early morning beetle races while parents are still asleep, and fear of parental anger at a bad report card. Almost all stories present the relationship between man and nature and teach the reader how to depend on nature for our existence. The character of the grandfather in "Grandfather's Private Zoo" encourages the reader to protect animals in their own way. It also describes different characteristics of animals in an interesting way and familiarizes the reader with many strange and sacred creatures. Major problems of ecosystems like deforestation, habitat loss, extinction of species and hunting are discussed through the words of the grandfather. This story creates a positive and sympathetic attitude towards fellow creatures and gives awareness that 'we should respect the rights of every creature on earth' and protect them from dangers.

He has always emphasized on the friendly relationship between man and nature and has brought before us our need for each other. That's why we notice his pity for the unsympathetic and cruel actions of human beings towards nature. He is a painter of words. Bond uses his pen as a brush to paint captivating images of his observations and experiences with nature and beckons his readers into his imagination. He is always worried about the increasing amount of environmental problems caused by human intervention, the extinction of animals and birds and the depletion of natural resources. In his works, through the settings of Himalaya and the portrayal of the daily lives of village people, he advises his readers to return to nature. The story "The Last Truck Ride" deals with the environmental problems caused by the cruelties of man, whereas "Grandfather's Private Zoo" conveys to the reader the responsibility of caring and protecting other creatures. Through "*The Road to the Bazaar*", Bond shows the importance of nature in man's life. The short stories of Bond provide an opportunity for the children to have an attraction towards the natural environment.

Nature becomes a character in Ruskin Bond's stories. It is omnipresent and omnipotent and more than a preferred backdrop of his tales. Nature becomes more important than human beings. It plays a vital role in their lives. The Himalayan landscape figures prominently in his

works. About his love for India's landscape, he says in the Preface to the book, *The India I Love*:

And there's the land itself, forest and plain, mountain and desert, river and sea, all mean different things to me. The sea brings memories of collecting seashells along palm-fringed beaches. The rivers- some of them described in these pages represent the continuity, the timelessness of India. The grandeur of the mountains, the changing colours of the desert, the splendours of the forest, and the riches of the fertile plains; all these I have loved, and have attempted to celebrate over the years, in the way I know best. (ix)

Bond presents nature in all her splendour. He binds man and nature, showing their interdependence in the chain of eco-system. His works always present ecology as an important theme. His concern for the thoughtless actions of man towards nature and the importance of nature in our lives is seen in his stories.

"Death of the Trees" tells us how the felling of trees affected Bond personally. It all started when the PWD decided to build another road into the mountains. The felling of the trees makes the hill bare and the forest birds' homeless. He is pained by the environmental degradation of the hills and the depletion of the forest cover due to the felling of trees and limestone quarrying. Bond goes on to say, "... no birds near the house. No longer will it be possible for me to open the window and watch the scarlet minuvets flitting through the dark green foliage...Forest birds all of them, will be in search of some other stretch of surviving forest". (94) Deforestation is closely followed by rapid urbanization causing damage to the environment and creating ecological imbalance to the region. He resents the mindless action of the government.

In the "The Last Truck Ride", Bond narrates the story of Pritam Singh, a truck driver who drove his lorry too fast. Nathu, his helper was a sturdy boy of uncertain age with a round cheerful face. He belonged to a faraway village of farmers but had come for work in the plains

as farming alone would not feed the whole family. A discussion on the way to the quarry gives true insight on the state of affairs:

The hills were bare and dry. Most of the forest had long since disappeared. Just a few scraggy old oaks still grew on the steep hillside. This particular range was rich in limestone and the hills were scarred by quarrying. 'Are your hills as bare as these?' Asked Pritam. 'No, they have not started blasting there as yet', said Nathu. 'We still have a few trees. (63)

Ruskin Bond was always concerned about the destruction of nature and its harmful effects on human life and society. Pritam takes the truck to the site where the labourers fill the truck with stones, after which they leave the site. Pritam was in good spirits and drove fast. A mule ran across and the truck went out of control and the truck went straight over the edge of the mountain. It came to rest against the trunk of a scraggy tree. Had it missed the tree, it would have plunged deeper. Pritam's life was saved by that tree. He decides to go to his sons' home and Nathu back to his village. 'I'll work on the land. It's better to grow things on the land than to blast things out of it'. (68) Bond ends the story very aptly telling us that nature has to be preserved, and man must stop the felling of trees. If we continue to do so, our life will be doomed. The story also highlights the human threats to nature like deforestation and quarry mining. His stories give a visual layout of the contentment called village life. It brings out emphatically how the people by the hills derive joys out of nature. The story gives a clear picture of environmental pollution caused by lime stone quarrying on the mountain areas and presents the health problems caused by pollution. It also portrays the pathetic situation of trees due to deforestation and quarrying. Through the words of Pritam Singh and Nathu, the story presents the importance of trees in human life. Bond advises the reader to grow things in their own land and thus encourage afforestation.

India depicted by Bond can never be complete without mentioning her jungles and unique wildlife. *Panther's Moon* and *Tigers Forever* are his strongest pleas for the preservation of

wildlife. Both stories illustrate that tigers turn into man eaters only because of human greed and fear, rapid deforestation and upsetting of the ecology and a violation of trust placed in humans by nature. He has skillfully knit the message of 'save tigers, save wildlife' in the plots of his fiction. Ruskin Bond suggests how the depletion of wild life has caused fierce enmity between man and the harried king of the forest. It has also left the forest 'open and vulnerable'. The tiger's disappearance is bound to lead to India's emasculation. The protagonist Romi remembered his grandfather having said that 'The tiger is the very soul of India and when the last tiger has gone, so will the soul of the country'. (180)

Ruskin Bond presents interdependent relationship between man and nature in his stories. He presents nature as a good friend, teacher, godly figure etc. Bond advises man to learn from nature and worship nature. He asks the readers to protect animals and trees and advises man to return to the lap of nature. Ruskin Bond's stories are powerful enough to stimulate and inspire children towards nature. However, it is important for children to be aware of ecocriticism as a movement in literature and its recent trends. It would guide teachers and take students in the trail towards inspiring the elders too who have forgotten their duties to nature. The stories create a positive attitude towards animals and their protection. Children are the best to be inspired, to invest and to propagate ecocriticism to the world. Ruskin Bond's stories, when taught will never be forgotten until it accomplishes this purpose. Bond has presented a realistic picture in his stories by picturizing the Himalayan landscapes and unveiling the hearts of the people of the hills, small towns and bazaars in India. He re-creates Indian ethos and presents his love of nature which is universal. His creative genius is always at work. It is still exploring and contemplating the hills and the trees, the earth and the sky without caring for the bouts of criticism.

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