



## ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS IN RUSKIN BOND'S SHORT STORIES

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### ABSTRACT:

Literature has always reflected human-nature relationship. We can't conceive human life without nature. There was harmonious relation between man and nature. But with Industrial revolution, and modern technology humans have begun exploiting nature. Today, mankind is facing severe environmental crisis everywhere on the planet.

Ruskin Bond has always remained a true lover of nature. His stories observe and contemplate the symbiotic connection between man and nature. This paper is an attempt to explore the key issues in Ruskin Bond's selected short stories like interdependent relationship between man and nature, harmful effects of human exploitation of nature and human accountability to the environment.

**Keywords:** *Environment, nature, man, ecology co-existence, eco-criticism.*

### INTRODUCTION :

Representations of the natural environment are as old as recorded literature. The Greek poet Theocritus and later, the Roman poet, Virgil depict the natural environment in their pastoral poetry. Literature has always reflected human-nature relationship. We can't conceive human life without nature. Human civilization developed over the years and in its each phase of development, it has brought in new innovations to make human life better. Ancient people would worship our mother earth with great reverence. There was harmonious relation between man and nature. Urbanization and modernization have made human life comfortable but only at the cost of environmental hazards.

Today, mankind is facing severe environmental crisis everywhere on the planet. The ozone layer is depleting due to deforestation and industrial pollution. We witness rapid climatic changes affecting human life. Our scientists and environmentalists have already warned us that if humanity does not show any concern for

nature, it will be very difficult to survive on the earth.

### ECOCRITICISM :

Ecocriticism originates in a bio-social context of unrestrained capitalism, excessive exploitation of nature, unplanned development and environmental hazard. Ecocriticism is an umbrella term under which a variety of approaches fall. It is interdisciplinary, calling for collaboration between scientists, writers, literary critics, anthropologists, historians and more. Ecocriticism, as a critical theory, is the developing branch of literary studies and it gained momentum in 1990s. It focuses on material contexts of industrialization, development, pollution and ecocide while developing a frame for reading.

The American and Romantic writers showed interest in nature and natural world. In the mid-nineteenth century, Thoreau and other writers in America and England were already drawing attention to the threats to the environment by urbanization and industrialization.

### **ECOLOGY IN INDIAN LITERATURE :**

In Indian literature, ecology has always remained in the backdrop. The writers like Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das and others have dealt with the theme of ecology. In the later phase, Anita Desai, Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond realizing the importance of environment, depicted it in their works. Not only novels but also the short stories offer works for ecological reading.

### **ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS IN RUSKIN BOND'S SHORT STORIES :**

Ruskin Bond has always remained a true lover of nature. His stories observe and contemplate the symbiotic connection between man and nature. In his short stories, he has aroused environmental concerns through his characters. His characters interact with animals, trees and flowers. They are eco-conscious and reflect his concern and his effort to sustain environment. Bond feels worried when he sees the destruction of natural environment. He exposes the ruthlessness of modern man in destroying our green world. Ruskin Bond lives in Mussoorie at the foothill of the Himalaya. The region is blessed with natural beauty. He interacts with all objects of nature, and feels that there is presence of life in object of nature. Ruskin Bond believes that all creatures and objects of nature have importance of their own and the harmony of nature pervades through them, no matter whether they are beautiful or ugly, great or insignificant. In his stories, he highlights the harmonious co-existence of man and nature. He draws material for his short stories from the objects of nature, trees wild flowers, birds, animals, rocks, rivers, and simple hill folk. His stories make us realise our duties and responsibilities to preserve the environment.

The stories selected here provide enough scope to better our understanding of the key issues in his works, like interdependent relationship

between man and nature, harmful effects of human exploitation of nature and human accountability to the environment. I have chosen four short stories of Ruskin Bond for analysis through the lens of ecocriticism.

### **DUST ON THE MOUNTAIN :**

In this story Dust on the Mountain, Ruskin Bond exposes how modern man is mercilessly destroying green nature. The central character in the story, Bisnu, a kid, comes to Mussoorie for his livelihood and to support his family. He is very much shocked to see the destruction of trees. He finds dust and contamination everywhere. Trees have been cut for industrial purpose. Bisnu and Chittru find that the top of the mountain is blasted away by dynamite to get limestone rock. The beautiful birds, insects, even green grass perish. Bond makes us realise how nature is preserver of man through the character of Pritam Singh who is always after material gain. One day he meets with a terrible accident but fortunately he is saved by an oak tree. The event makes him realise the importance of trees and he makes up his mind to work in his land and to grow trees on the land than to blast things out of it. Thus, the story ends with an optimistic note.

### **THE CHERRY TREE :**

In the story, The Cherry Tree, Rakesh, a boy of six lives with his grandfather. One day he walks from the Mussoorie bazaar eating cherries. With his grandfather's advice he plants a cherry seed and then forgets about it. After few days, on a spring morning he is pleasantly surprised to see a small twig of cherry tree. He keeps taking care of that tiny plant through all the seasons and saves it from all the impediments. The cherry tree grows and with-it Rakesh too. One day there appear flowers and the tree is laden with fruits. Insects, birds, and bees attracting to the cherry tree, visit it regularly. Rakesh's joy knows no bound. The cherry tree grows big enough that Rakesh and his grandfather love to rest

under it. Thus, Ruskin Bond depicts how a little boy's love for the cherry tree one day provides a shelter for birds, bees and animals. Ruskin Bond indirectly makes us eco-conscious and gives the message that man can live in harmony with nature.

#### **NO ROOM FOR A LEOPARD :**

No Room for Leopard is a touching story in which Ruskin Bond depicts the disgraceful condition of animals as a result of deforestation on the hills. Many animals had to move to the valleys inhabited by human. This makes animals like leopard come in contact with local inhabitants and putting their life in danger. The young narrator used to frequent forest areas and thus got familiar with various birds and animals and even a leopard. They knew that the narrator would not harm them as he did not have any such intention. He would just watch them and the animals and birds got accustomed to him. Sometimes the birds would alert him from the leopard in the nearby area. Thus, the bond of love was established between the narrator and the animals. Even the leopard began to trust him. But one day, a band of Shikaris moves into the forest, the leopard was not so cautious as it began to trust human beings. But its trust of human is broken. The Leopard mistook Shikaris to be friends like the narrator and was killed by them. The act of Shikaris will make them distrust human being forever.

The story brings out the difference between the world of animals and the world of greedy human beings. It also brings out the contrast between children's pure, selfless, innocent and compassionate world and the self-centered, greedy merciless adult world. Thus, Ruskin Bond says that there is enough space for man and mountain leopard. Both can live peacefully if there is mutual understanding, trust, and sincere love between them. But the greed of man betrays that trust for material gains. The

Shikaries killed the leopard for its skin. Thus, the impact of deforestation on animals is highlighted in the story.

#### **AN ISLAND OF TREES :**

In An Island of Trees Ruskin Bond appeals to plant more trees. He gives the message that our survival on earth is possible as long as there are trees. The story is woven around Koki, a girl of ten and her grandmother. Koki's grandmother tells Koki that her great grandfather had a great love for trees and he would feel life in each and every plant. The plants and her great-grandfather had love for each other.

Ruskin Bond feels sorrowful when he sees that everywhere in the world trees and animals are being destroyed by the people. In his short stories, he seems to imbibe in his readers the importance of flora and fauna in maintaining ecological balance. Through his characters, he appeals his readers to realise that nature is vitally important for man's survival on earth. Koki's grandmother rightly says that her great-grandfather told her that not only wild creatures but mankind need trees. Trees keep deserts away, attract rain and prevent river banks from soil erosion. But unfortunately, people are cutting trees without replanting new ones. If this continues, then one day there will be no forests at all. The world will become one great desert.

#### **CONCLUSION :**

Ruskin Bond's short stories are replete with his sincere love for flora and fauna. The objects of nature are living characters of his stories. He has a deep love for them. He interacts with them and cares for them. He makes us realise our duty and responsibility towards nature. Thus, he evokes ecological consciousness through his short stories.

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