



## **ECHOES OF ENVIRONMENT AND HOMESICKNESS IN RUSKIN BOND'S SELECT WORKS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The perspective on ecology in Ruskin Bond's writings reveals the richness of the flora and fauna of the picturesque position of Dehradun and Mussoorie in the foothills of the Himalayas. Being a Nature lover, Ruskin Bond was able to bring out the essence of the environment without any strenuous and conscious effort. His works never fail to reflect his nostalgia and his ardent belief in the therapeutic powers of Nature. This article throws light on the strong impact of Nature on his memory in the following short stories The Cherry Tree and My Father's Trees in Dehra.*

**Keywords:** eco-sensitivity, ecology, eco-criticism, nostalgia, flora and fauna

### **INTRODUCTION**

Creative writing takes the accountability to recapture the events occurring in the contemporary society to create awareness among the people of what is happening at their vicinity. Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It is an interdisciplinary approach in which texts that exemplify environmental concerns are analysed. It observes the various ways in which fiction deals with the subject Nature. The swift growth and advancement in the field of science and technology paved a new way for the literary critics to judge texts from the environmentalist point of view. Eco-critics are apprehensive about the present day ecological crisis and explore the literary texts that build up the ecological concerns among the people.

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One of the chief aims of eco-criticism is to transfer human attitudes from anthropocentric view to a bio-centric one. Eco-critics promote people to reflect on the relationship of humans to Nature, the decent and visual dilemmas posted by the environmental crisis and how language and literature broadcast values with profound ecological implications.

The equivalence of man and a tree gives the quintessence of Ruskin Bond's treatment of Nature which is familiar to all. From time to time, Nature with all her mysteries and beauty has been a perennial source of muse for all the writers in different languages around the world. The writers have approached Nature in accordance with their mindset and the life around them. Very few like Ruskin Bond take pleasure in running with the winds, smiling with the flowers and conversing with the trees. Nature rises as a potent backdrop conveying the strength of the story and Ruskin Bond is a skilled master in painting word landscapes which lie in harmony with the motif of the plot.

Ruskin Bond is a devoted lover of natural history as he breathes through her and writes for her. His imagination is sparkled up by the quaint beauties of Nature interwoven with the melodies of breeze and also shapes a distinctive world free from the cacophonous notes of the modern world. Far from the nauseating view of the socio-political humbug, his literary journey tracks on a different path in hunt of a winter garden, a cherry tree in Maplewood, a leopard or a panther, a hidden brook, a wayside teashop or a small railway platform.

While most of the current writers of his period focussed on social, psychological, political and cultural disintegration of man, Ruskin Bond seems to be consciously travelling away from the humongous hurdles of the motorized world. He preferably relishes the divine exquisiteness of the hills and dales in the Himalayas. The entire collection of his works comprising of both fiction and non-fiction is a magnificent document of his strong and intimate alliance with Nature. It provides him with limitless impressions, which he shapes in the form of a moving story, novel, an article or essay. He takes pleasure in writing about a flower which is left unnoticed by others. For him not only the flower, but also the individual who grows it is fascinating enough to be the focus of his subject.

Ruskin Bond's works show how man is in tune with Nature, and sporadically how Nature is distressed by reconstruction. In his short story *The Cherry Tree*, Bond has tried to trigger the eco-consciousness and ecological awareness in young minds through a narrative of a boy's will to plant a cherry tree. The story is about a young boy Rakesh who is six years old and lives with his grandfather on the outskirts of Mussoorie. The story reflects on the real-life relationship between Ruskin Bond and his grandfather. It defines the growth of Rakesh as a person and also his attachment with the Nature. The boy planted the last seed of the cherry fruit in his garden with the help of his grandfather. The boy guarded the cherry tree with all



his heart through all the seasons: “Even when there was rain, Rakesh would sometimes water the tree. He wanted it to know that he was there” (Bond 135).

Through the eyes of Rakesh, Ruskin Bond has created a sense of responsibility towards environment and has depicted the duty of an individual in saving the ecosystem. Ruskin Bond also tries to make us understand that Nature never falls short to do its duty for the welfare of the humans, even though they fail to protect her. He pleads his readers through his stories to plant more trees. Ruskin Bond's dream to protect Nature is a natural outcome of living close to the trees. Just as how the nourishment of a mother is important for her child, similarly the cherry tree and Nature as a whole needs care and protection through all the seasons. The growth of the tree through the different seasons and years represents the life of Rakesh from a six year old to a ten year old boy. Ruskin Bond portrays the cherry tree as an individual entity in the short story. He also showcases his strong and everlasting bond with his grandfather with whom he spent most of his childhood days.

In the end of the story, grandfather makes Rakesh realise that even though there are many trees and plants in the garden, the cherry tree will always hold a significant place in the shady corner of the garden: “We planted it ourselves and that is what makes it special” (Bond 137). This single act of kindness towards Nature i.e. planting a tree makes Rakesh understand the beauty of creation. Knowing that the tree has fully grown because of the one small act of planting a seed has made him realise the huge difference of his contribution towards the environment.

*The Cherry Tree* is didactic in approach as it also transmits a well-built theme of resilience and growth. Through this story Bond has conveyed an intense and empathetic message to safeguard the eco-system. Gifted with the eye of a mystic, he observes the growth of plants as virtually moving and stretching their limbs to embrace each other. For him the trees emerge as archetypal fellow beings as he appreciates the mystical union of trees and mountains in silence. He experiences the power of the sky, the earth and a small cherry seed alike. A seed serves as the microcosmic force of Nature and its authority to survive is invincible.

Ruskin Bond's another eco-concerned short story, *My Father's Trees in Dehra*, represents the author's nostalgic visit to Dehra after many years. In this short story one can see that the writer admires life in all its forms and living in the midst of Nature has enabled him to establish a perpetual bond with its elements. The story acquaints one with a quixotic and captivated sight of childhood in which the protagonist is brought up in the adoring and fostering arms of his father, ayah, and gardener. The valleys of Dehra were filled with moist air and the soil was hospitable to the flora of the region. The British savoured Dehra as a luxurious retreat since it reminded them of the countryside in England.



The writer's visit to Dehra after twenty years makes him experience a sense of isolation, fear and profound nostalgia. Nostalgia can be aroused through various factors and memories. Certain sparse moments are imprinted in the minds of people and are idealized in their personal memory. Through nostalgia, people may travel back to some specific time in the past and it may trigger emotions or feelings experienced with their cherished ones. The writer revisits the places of his childhood and is unable to view the vast changes that have happened to the Dehra of his childhood. He comes across the roads that are still lined with eucalyptus, jacaranda, lichi and laburnum trees. The writer feels pathetic about the downfall of trees and plants in the houses of Dehra and that people only care about them in the season of harvest.

The human bondage with Nature seeks the greatest expression in this story. The narrator considers Dehra as a land which is favourable to trees because of its productive aura. The writer shared a beautiful relationship with his father Aubrey Alexander Bond who was an English mentor and concierge. He and his father want to preserve both flora and fauna in Dehra. The story circles around Ruskin Bond's ailing father's intimate affinity with trees so much so that he feels joyous and enlivened whenever he is among the easeful company of the trees. Their closeness is further outspread when the author finds a tendril of a creeping vine which, instead of moving towards him touches the feet of his father: "I sat alone beneath a tree, I felt a little lonely or lost. As soon as my father rejoined me, the atmosphere lightened, the tree itself became more friendly" (Bond 145).

The writer and his father planted an island full of tamarind, laburnum and coral-tree saplings and cuttings. On revisiting this island after the demise of his father, the writer goes through a plethora of poignant memories and emotions that are rooted firm in his heart just as how the trees stood tall and strong. The small rocky island now served as an abode for a number of parrots and koel birds. Even though the writer was alone and without company he was able to experience a familial association with the trees that surrounded him.

Since Ruskin Bond was a motherless child he found reimbursement in the warm lap of Nature. His trip with his father nurtured him as a naturalist and environmentalist. His father's faith in the living organism of Nature was firmly established in his mind with the passage of time. Later, after his father's tragic demise, Ruskin Bond found the hills kind enough to offer him a formidable sense of parental security. The trees and plants around him also assumed the role of a protector. They emerged to be the shaping spirit of his dear father: "In this small forgotten corner of the world, my father's dreams are coming true and the trees are moving again" (Bond 146).

Ruskin Bond avoids intellectualisation of Nature as he is not keen to advocate any theory of Nature. Unlike Wordsworth, he feels that too much application of cold logic distorts the reality; even mystification sometimes estranges simple objects. Ruskin Bond comes close to

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D H Lawrence who believed in the religion of blood. He ached for the contact with Earth and was filled with nostalgia for the bright sensory delights that surrounded him. He rejects the inconsistent material progress because it exhorts the human sensibility and turns life mechanical. Tramping around the hills has been his favourite pastime as it gives him numerous sensations and impressions of life around; each new stirring, passerby and sound thrills his nerves during the gaze walk.

The unique mark of his characters is their primitive innocence and ardent faith in Nature. They imbibe Nature's attributes like innocence, simplicity and purity. They represent life's finest attribute i.e. the ability to find happiness and contentment in everyday events. His long association with Nature made him acquire a unique understanding of their habits. The charm of tiny creatures like butterflies, caterpillars, beetles, squirrels were closely observed by the writer. His microscopic view does not spare a single living creature around him. Like a biologist he records a photographic story of their ways and habits. He does not consider them inferior to man in any way because they also constitute a vital part of the globe.

This article aims at revisiting Rustin Bond's message to the complicated world where protecting ecology is essential to shape an ethical perspective for a better and prospective future. The author's noteworthy gesture to play the role of an eco-writer is clearly visible through the reading of his works. Ruskin Bond subtly detects overambitious advancement, pinpoints the needed rectification and makes one rethink and glorify Nature. Nature bares her bosom alike for all big and small, weak and strong. One may approach Nature to conquer her, the other may try to exploit her, but one who chooses to live with love for her, chooses to live with her in total harmony. Our approach to Nature begins from the simple sensory delights and culminates into humanism. The personal contentment should not be contingent exclusively on material longings, because they are momentary. The study of Nature helps the readers to get back to the forgotten environment and regain qualities of innocence, simplicity and faith.

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