
Eco-Critical Perspectives in the Short Stories of Ruskin Bond

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Abstract

Eco-criticism is a critical approach to literature and culture that focuses on the relationships between human beings and the natural world. It emerged in the 1990s as a response to growing concerns about environmental degradation and the impact of human activity on the planet. Eco-criticism also emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on fields such as biology, ecology, and environmental studies to enrich literary analysis. It seeks to explore the complex and dynamic relationships between human beings and the natural world, and to uncover the ways in which these relationships are shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. Eco-critical perspectives in the short stories of **Ruskin Bond** reveal a deep, sensitive, and often nostalgic engagement with **nature, environmental values,** and the **human-nature relationship.** His works, set primarily in the **foothills of the Himalayas,** celebrate the beauty of the natural world while subtly critiquing the ecological damage caused by modernity, urbanization, and human negligence. Ruskin Bond's short stories offer **a gentle yet powerful eco-critical voice** that urges readers to **reconnect with nature,** appreciate its beauty, and respect its boundaries. His work aligns with **deep ecology** and **pastoral environmentalism,** offering a **quiet resistance to ecological destruction** through the lens of storytelling.

Key Words: Eco-criticism, Environmentalism, Landscape description

Eco-criticism is a critical approach to literature and culture that focuses on the relationships between human beings and the natural world. It emerged in the 1990s as a response to growing concerns about environmental degradation and the impact of human activity on the planet (Glotfelty and Fromm 2). Eco-critics examine the ways in which literature and other cultural forms represent and interact with the natural world. They are interested in exploring the ways in which environmental issues and concerns are reflected in literary texts, considering how literature can be

used to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote sustainability and ecological awareness. Eco-criticism also emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on fields such as biology, ecology, and environmental studies to enrich literary analysis. It seeks to explore the complex and dynamic relationships between human beings and the natural world, and to uncover the ways in which these relationships are shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. Eco-criticism has been influential in a variety of fields, including literature, cultural studies, and environmental studies. It has been used to analyze a wide range of literary works, from classic literature to contemporary eco-fiction, and has been applied to other cultural forms, such as film and art.

Eco-criticism encompasses a broad range of possibilities in how we approach literary texts, and it shares some common features with cultural studies, feminist criticism, Marxist criticism, and postcolonial criticism as well as deconstruction. Examining the representation of animals, plants, and other non-human elements in literature can reveal insights into human attitudes towards nature and the environment. Eco-criticism can uncover anthropocentric (human-centered) perspectives versus bio-centric (life-centered) or eco-centric (ecosystem-centered) perspectives.

Analyzing the interactions between human characters and the environment or non-human characters can reveal underlying ecological insights or critiques. This includes relationships that are symbiotic, exploitative, or transformative. Literature that explores themes of ecological disaster, dystopian futures due to environmental degradation, or post-apocalyptic scenarios can be rich ground for eco-critical analysis. These narratives often serve as warnings or critiques of current environmental policies and practices. The use of nature-related symbols and imagery in literature can convey deeper meanings about the human condition, society's relationship with nature, and philosophical or spiritual insights related to the natural world.

Myths and indigenous beliefs deeply influence the way Indian English literature engages with the environment. These traditional worldviews shape a distinct ecological consciousness—one that views nature not as a passive resource but as sacred, sentient, and interconnected with human life. In Indian literary texts, especially those with rural, tribal, or religious settings, such beliefs challenge dominant industrial or capitalist views of nature. Many Indian myths and indigenous belief systems deify natural elements. Rivers like the Ganga, mountains like the Himalayas, and trees like the Peepal are considered sacred. For instance, in Arundhati

Roy's *The God of Small Things* subtly invokes the sacredness of rivers and landscapes, even as they are degraded by modern development. Similarly, in Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* draws upon myths around the Narmada River, presenting it as both a geographical and spiritual force.

Another aspect is the Indigenous communities often practice animism, the belief that all natural entities—trees, animals, rivers—possess a spirit or consciousness. This belief fosters respect and a deep ecological ethic. For instance, Mahasweta Devi's *Pterodactyl*, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha explores how tribal people view the forest as a living entity, not merely as timber or land. The pterodactyl becomes a symbol of ancient, sacred knowledge lost in modern times. Myths often become tools of resistance when communities use them to challenge developmental projects that exploit natural resources. In many Indian novels and short stories, indigenous characters invoke myths or spirits of the forest to protest mining, dam construction, or deforestation. Myths related to goddesses (like Prithvi, Ganga, or Aranyani) often merge ecological and feminist concerns, showing how exploitation of nature parallels the exploitation of women. For instance, in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the river goddess *Bon Bibi*, revered by both Hindus and Muslims in the Sundarbans, represents harmony between humans and nature.

Another aspect in Indian literature is the integration of Folklore and Oral Traditions. Indian literature frequently integrates folk tales and oral traditions that encode ecological wisdom such as the importance of biodiversity, rain cycles, and seasonal rhythms. Ruskin Bond's short stories reflect Pahari and local oral traditions that celebrate harmony with nature and highlight human responsibility in preserving it. Moreover, unlike linear Western views of time and progress, Indian myths often represent cyclical time, reinforcing ideas of regeneration, sustainability, and balance. In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, echoes of mythic pasts and fading traditions contrast with modern loss and environmental decay.

Indigenous and myth-based perspectives tie identity to geography. Land is not a commodity, but a living memory—thus loss of land is loss of culture. In many postcolonial Indian novels, displacement of tribals is shown not only as economic trauma but as spiritual and ecological loss. Myths and indigenous beliefs in Indian literature embed ecological ethics within cultural and spiritual narratives, offer alternative, sustainable models of coexistence with nature and resist destructive ideologies of modernity and development. They help construct a distinctly Indian ecological consciousness rooted in tradition

Eco-critical perspectives in the short stories of **Ruskin Bond** reveal a deep, sensitive, and often nostalgic engagement with **nature, environmental values,** and the **human-nature relationship.** His works, set primarily in the **foothills of the Himalayas,** celebrate the beauty of the natural world while subtly critiquing the ecological damage caused by modernity, urbanization, and human negligence.

In many of his stories, nature is not just a backdrop but a **living, breathing entity** with its own spirit and will. Bond gives agency to trees, rivers, animals, and mountains, creating a **biocentric world** where humans are just one part of a larger ecosystem. For instance, "*The Cherry Tree*" is a simple story about a boy planting a cherry seed, this narrative subtly explores themes of **growth, renewal, and human responsibility towards nature.** The tree's struggle to grow symbolizes nature's quiet resilience and persistence. Bond frequently portrays **symbiotic relationships** between human characters and the natural world. His stories suggest that **emotional well-being and moral integrity** are closely tied to one's connection with the environment. In "*Panther's Moon*", the tension between man and beast in a rural village setting shows how **co-existence and respect for wildlife** are necessary for ecological harmony.

Similarly, Bond often laments the **loss of pristine nature** due to urbanization and modernization. Through nostalgic tones, he critiques how **progress has led to ecological degradation,** deforestation, and the loss of biodiversity. In "*Dust on the Mountain*", he deals with the journey of Bisnu, a Garhwal boy who witnesses the environmental degradation caused by mining and deforestation. It reflects Bond's concern about **man's exploitation of nature for economic gain.** Bond contrasts the **innocent, peaceful life of villagers** who live in harmony with nature against **outsiders** (contractors, developers, bureaucrats) who exploit and damage the environment. For instance in "*A Guardian Angel*", he juxtaposes the innocence of a small child and the untouched hills with the harshness of adult life and how societal forces often endanger both children and nature.

Bond often writes from a **child's perspective,** whose **innocent wonder toward nature** serves as a model for readers. Children in his stories are naturally inclined to love and protect the environment. Even in a short story like "*The Thief*" which is not overtly ecological, it contains scenes of simplicity and close connection with rural life and nature, showing how young people are influenced by the world around them. Ruskin Bond frequently uses **seasonal changes, weather, and landscape descriptions** to reflect the **emotional states** of his characters. Nature

mirrors human moods and becomes an emotional companion. While not a naturalist story, ‘The Woman on Platform 8’, the setting (the railway platform) and the passing trains create a contrast with the calm, rural world that Bond often evokes—a reminder of **disconnectedness from nature in urban settings**.

Rather than making overt political statements, Bond embeds a gentle **moral message** about respecting nature, understanding its rhythms, and acknowledging the **spiritual solace it offers**. His eco-criticism is **subtle, poetic, and experiential**, grounded in **personal engagement with nature** rather than theoretical discourse. Ruskin Bond’s short stories offer a **gentle yet powerful eco-critical voice** that urges readers to **reconnect with nature**, appreciate its beauty, and respect its boundaries. His work aligns with **deep ecology** and **pastoral environmentalism**, offering a **quiet resistance to ecological destruction** through the lens of storytelling.

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