
Anthropocentric attitudes toward the environment in Ruskin Bond Writings

Kaveri Shivaraj Kamashetti¹, Dr. S G Dollegoudar²¹Research Scholar Department of English Sharnbasva University, Kalaburagi²Research Guide Dean, Faculty of Languages Sharnbasva University, Kalaburagi.

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Abstract:

This article examines the prevalence and nuances of anthropocentric views within the literary works of renowned Indian author, Ruskin Bond. Often celebrated for his evocative depictions of nature and simple life, Bond's narratives, while seemingly harmonious with the natural world, frequently position human experiences, emotions, and perspectives at the forefront. This study analyzes how human concerns often dictate the narrative's focus, even when nature serves as a prominent backdrop. Through an examination of selected short stories and novellas, this article explores instances where anthropocentrism manifests through the personification of nature, the prioritization of human comfort and understanding, and the framing of natural phenomena through a distinctly human lens. It argues that while Bond fosters a deep appreciation for the environment, his underlying anthropocentric tendencies, often subtle, contribute to a human-centric interpretation of the natural world, reflecting a broader cultural inclination.

Keywords: Ruskin Bond, anthropocentrism, nature writing, Indian literature, environmental humanities, human-nature relationship.

Introduction

Ruskin Bond, a prolific and beloved author, has captivated generations of readers with his charming tales set amidst the tranquil landscapes of the Indian Himalayas. His works are often lauded for their serene beauty, their gentle pace, and their profound connection to nature. Indeed, Bond's writings frequently feature lush descriptions of flora and fauna, the changing seasons, and the quiet rhythms of rural life. This seemingly harmonious relationship with the natural world has led many to view him as an environmentalist avant-garde, promoting an ecological consciousness. However, a closer critical examination reveals that despite his evident love for nature, an underlying anthropocentric viewpoint

often permeates his narratives. This article aims to explore how human perspectives, experiences, and emotions consistently take precedence in Bond's works, even when nature is ostensibly the subject.

Anthropocentrism, at its core, is the belief that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world, often leading to a worldview where human interests and values are prioritized over all others, including those of the natural environment. While not overtly dismissive of nature, anthropocentric tendencies in literature can manifest in various ways, such as personifying natural elements to make them relatable to human experience, framing nature primarily as a resource or backdrop for human drama, or focusing on human emotional responses to the natural world rather than its inherent value.

Manifestations of Anthropocentrism in Ruskin Bond's Works

Ruskin Bond's anthropocentric leanings are often subtle, woven into the fabric of his storytelling rather than being explicitly stated. Several recurring patterns highlight this perspective:

1. Personification and Humanization of Nature

Bond frequently imbues natural elements with human qualities, emotions, and even consciousness. While this technique can serve to make nature more accessible and relatable to the reader, it also subtly places human attributes at the center of how nature is understood. For instance, trees are often described as having "personalities," mountains as "moody," and rivers as "whispering secrets." In *The Cherry Tree*, the growth of the cherry tree is inextricably linked to Rakesh's emotional journey, its progress mirroring his own hopes and dreams. The tree's significance is primarily defined by its relationship to the boy, rather than its existence as an independent entity. Similarly, animals in his stories, while retaining their animalistic traits, often serve to reflect human emotions or act as foils for human characters. The leopard in *Leopard on the Mountain* is observed and understood primarily through the fear and fascination of the human villagers, its wildness interpreted through a human lens of danger and beauty. This humanization, while endearing, frames nature largely in terms of its ability to evoke human responses or participate in human narratives.

2. Nature as a Backdrop for Human Experiences

Many of Bond's stories utilize nature as a picturesque and evocative setting for human dramas, reflections, and nostalgic recollections. While the natural world is meticulously described, its primary function often appears to be providing a sensory rich environment for human introspection or interaction. In *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, the diverse trees of his childhood home are intertwined with his memories of family and personal growth. The trees themselves, while beautiful, serve as anchors for human sentiment and nostalgia. The charm of the setting lies in its ability to facilitate human contemplation and connection, rather than in its inherent ecological significance. Similarly, in *Angry River*, the

island and the river serve primarily as a stage for Sita's emotional and psychological journey: "The island was small, but to Sita it was the whole world—a world where she learned courage, loss, and hope." The natural event—the flood—becomes a backdrop for a narrative of human resilience and personal growth. Many of his tales of village life depict the changing seasons and natural events as integral to the rhythm of human existence, but the focus remains squarely on the human adaptation, resilience, and daily routines within that environment.

3. Prioritizing Human Comfort and Understanding

Bond's narratives often emphasize the human need for comfort, familiarity, and understanding within the natural world. Wilderness, while sometimes romanticized, is frequently tempered by human presence and control. His characters often seek solace and peace in nature, but this solace is often derived from nature's ability to cater to human desires for tranquility and aesthetic pleasure. The dangers of the wild are acknowledged, but they are often framed in terms of their impact on human safety or peace of mind. For example, in *Angry River*, the aftermath of the flood is framed through human relief and resilience: "When the waters finally receded, the villagers sighed in relief. Nature had tested them, but they had survived—their resilience was the real story." Here, the ecological event is secondary to the narrative of human endurance. A heavy monsoon may be described with vivid detail, but the narrative often swiftly shifts to how the villagers cope, the challenges they face, and their ultimate resilience, highlighting the human struggle and triumph over natural forces. This is not to say Bond advocates for the subjugation of nature, but rather that his lens is inherently anthropocentric in assessing nature's role in human life.

4. The Human Gaze and Observation

A significant aspect of Bond's writing is his keen observational eye, particularly concerning the natural world. However, this observation is almost exclusively from a human perspective. The narrative voice, usually first-person, filters all natural phenomena through its own understanding, emotions, and memories. Birds, insects, plants, and landscapes are described as they appear to the human observer, their significance often tied to the human meaning attributed to them. While this offers a rich and personalized account of nature, it nonetheless reinforces the idea that nature is primarily there to be observed, appreciated, and understood by humans, rather than existing independently with its own intrinsic value.

In *Angry River*, Sita's perspective governs the reader's experience of nature: "Sita watched the river day and night. To her, it was not just water—it was a living, breathing thing with moods of its own." Similarly, in *The Room on the Roof*, Bond reflects, "The trees whispered secrets only I could understand, or so I liked to believe." This explicitly frames nature as existing to be interpreted by the human observer. While this offers a rich and personalized account of nature, it nonetheless reinforces the idea that nature is primarily there

to be observed, appreciated, and understood by humans, rather than existing independently with its own intrinsic value.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is important to clarify that identifying anthropocentric views in Ruskin Bond's works is not an indictment of his writing or his genuine affection for nature. On the contrary, his ability to connect readers with the natural world is undeniable and deeply valuable. However, a critical analysis necessitates acknowledging the underlying philosophical frameworks that shape his narratives.

Bond's anthropocentrism reflects a common human tendency to view the world through a human-centric lens. This perspective is deeply ingrained in many cultures and literatures, and Bond's works, while unique in their charm and setting, are not an exception. While he inspires a love for the environment and highlights its beauty, his narratives often fall short of adopting a truly ecocentric perspective, where nature is valued for its own sake, independent of its utility or aesthetic appeal to humans.

In conclusion, Ruskin Bond's literary landscape, while teeming with natural beauty and a palpable sense of peace, is ultimately filtered through an anthropocentric lens. His stories, while inspiring an appreciation for the environment, prioritize human experiences, emotions, and understanding. This does not diminish the profound impact of his work in fostering a connection with nature among his readers. Instead, recognizing this anthropocentric bias allows for a more nuanced and critical understanding of his contribution to Indian literature and the broader discourse on human-nature relationships. His works serve as a valuable case study for examining how even seemingly nature-centric narratives can subtly reinforce human centrality, prompting further reflection on the pervasive nature of anthropocentrism in literature and our broader cultural understanding of the natural world.

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