

## Posthuman Ecological Concerns in the Select Works of Ruskin Bond: A Critical Study.

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Article Link: <https://aksharasurya.com/2023/06/sukanya-jalihal/>

### **Abstract:**

*The immediacy to develop the posthuman concerns/approaches towards the depleting ecology, calls for a convergence of literary narratives to stimulate the human mind towards ecological conservation. There has been an undeclared environmental emergency that needs to be addressed at the earliest in the wake of global warming. Ruskin Bond's short stories portray the need to develop an amicable relation with the nature and its profundities in the era of plastics & its horrific effects on the environment. Banyan trees, oak, pine trees, blue sky, pristine rivers, globules of nectar, fragrance of fallen pine needles, shiny grass, chilly mountain streams, the majestic Himalayas, all find place in the literary portrait of Bond. Technological advancement has robbed the nature of its purity, and has exposed the mankind to the dangers of extinction. Bond's short stories reverberate the concern for the ecology and*

*underlines the dependence of humans on the nature. The Cherry Tree, Dust on the Mountain, Time stops at Shamli, Tiger, Tiger Burning bright, and other short stories contain the beauty of flora and fauna and instils a strong urge to preserve the nature for the mankind's survival. This paper aims at establishing the importance of re-reading Ruskin Bond, since planet earth is in a precarious condition. It is time to adopt a posthuman approach towards the ecology and harness the nature for the human need, and not for greed. The bio technological developments, such as synthetic intelligence, robotics, genetic modification, and bio-engineering, etc. have insinuated dystopian condition filled with anxieties about a human existence. Bond's short stories are a consolation and brings a ray of hope to the tattered souls.*

**Key Words:** *Catastrophe, Ecology, Dystopia, Himalayas, Posthuman.*

Ruskin Bond is often described as the Indian Wordsworth for his affinity with nature. Having spent most of his life in places like Shimla, Dehradun and Mussoorie. These places are the sand boxes whereas Bond's love and passion for ecology is universal. He has been celebrating the mesmerising nature and the surroundings of Himalayan foot hills. Re-reading of Ruskin Bond's short stories in the present scenario & extremely relevant. Man has been plundering the nature and

abusing the natural resources recklessly. Earth, water, sky, mountains flora and fauna are endangered. Humans are at the cross road of existential crisis, forcing him to sit up and take notice of the nature which is in a precarious condition. Nature is inevitable for the survival of the humans, but it is ironical that humans themselves have turned foes to the nature in the process of self-aggrandizement.

“The Cherry Tree” narrates resilience, dedication, conflict, growth and responsibility. The trees are being strangulated in the name of development and technological advancement. Rapid pace of road building through forests and protected areas endangers animals and threatens ecology. When a road opens up an area, it serves as an ancillary to further development, increasing the human foot print, and destroying the pristine rainforests. Mountain roads can accelerate the devastation caused by natural disasters, and the losses can be colossal as during the floods and landslides in Uttarakhand in 2013 and Ladakh in 2010. Over half of the landslides studied following the Kashmir earthquake in 2005 in which thousands lost their lives, were linked to human activity. Construction of roads was the most common cause landslides as they steepen the slope angle.

Laying the roads passing through the forests is detrimental to the ecology. Roads have sliced almost the entire land surface of the earth into no less than 6, 00,000 pieces, half of which are less than 1sq. km. in size. Such fragmentation causes havoc to flora and fauna. They cut off well-worn migratory paths of wild species, caging them into small forest patches, making them more vulnerable to localized extinctions.

Such isolated patches decay faster. Trees store carbon and act as carbon sink, produce oxygen which is vital for existence of life on the earth, acting as the lungs of the earth. Forests regulate the hydrological cycle, planetary climate, purify water, provide wild life habitat, reduce global warming, absorb toxic substance, mitigate natural hazards and deliver bounties to humans. Rapid urbanization has been endangering the very existence forests and ecology. It is said that, if the Amazon forests have to saved, all the roads leading to it should be bombed!

Bond's "Cherry Tree" stands as an image of renewal and re-growth in the face of adverse situation. Despite the pathetic condition, Bond hopes for a ray of sun shine towards the conservation of forests. Gandhiji had long back admonished that, nature has enough bounties to fulfil the need of the humans, and not his greed. Every element in nature is like a part of a moving airplane, if a minor part is also detached, the airplane is bound to crash. Similarly, every single tree is inevitable for the ecology and there is not even a single minute thing in the biosphere that could be considered as insignificant. One wonders how it is possible to be so insensitive and greedy towards the ecology. Bond appeals to conserve nature for the posterior generation, by giving up our gluttonous need and greed.

Bond audaciously questions in his work, *WhereHave All the Trees Gone*, taking to task and making the agencies and the organisations responsible for the depletion of forests. Bond is often psychologically associated with the trees and treats them as his own family, which indeed is a rare phenomenon. He sees

the patriarchal approach of men in extracting and abusing the tender nature, as it is voiceless. Yet, nature has its own agency and authority, if provoked could wreak havoc on earth. Earth quakes, Tsunamis and the flash floods are the warning bells buzzed by the agencies of nature, forewarning the greedy humans to stop the destructive developmental misadventures at the earliest. Where do all the birds re-locate themselves if forests are disappearing at such a rapid pace?

Bond mentions that the forest birds are “in search of some other stretch of surviving forest.” (Bond, 2008). This stretch of surviving forest, illustrates the weak and helpless state of all these very term natural beings. Birds have been an inevitable part of Eco-system and their very presence in the forests indicates a healthy atmosphere. Ironically, many of the bird species have been on the verge of extinction. This alarming situation is not lesser than a death knell to humans. Radiation towers, illegal construction of Thermal Plants, mushrooming of resorts inside the forests have put together an indomitable challenge. To the very existence of ecology. Bond is saddened by the fact about how every year; thousands of Himalayan trees become victims of forest fire. Ruskin Bond has been an activist and a crusader to conserve the Himalayan ecology.

Ruskin Bond explores the theoretical possibilities of post humanism and presents ecologies of repair as a heuristic device to explore the association modes of different entities, which when confronted with the effects of human-induced destructive events, seek to repair the damage and transform the conditions of coexistence of various life forms. A post-human approach to

nature allows us to use languages and methodologies that do not restrict the emergence of assemblages under the assumption of their a priori ontological separation, but rather examine their reparative potential based on the efficacy of situated relationships. Bond's short stories consider of the non-human-agencies shaping the world. It provides theoretical reflection on recent processes of intense damage or affectation that unleash creative social forces to rebuild broken relationships, damaged ecosystems, and obsolete institutions, through explicit recognition of the capacity of agency and practices that involve people, animals, objects and other materials. It is within this process of care where life emerges with creative intensity despite destruction and ecological damage. Post humanist philosophy results an anthropocentric movement, which to a certain extent, invites us to place ourselves beyond the individual. Crises and reparations do not occur in isolation. Post humanism explores the spectrum of a global ecological crisis that verges the possibilities to be explored for conviviality beyond the modern tools of science, democracy and capitalism. Bond, in his work, "A Town Called Dehra", laments the narrow mentalities of humans who do not mind taking short-cut routes to achieve success at the cost of environment. Everyone seems to be in a rat race. Poachers, smugglers been Sandalwood trees, forest brigands of posing a constant threat to the forests.

Ruskin Bond claims a relationship with the trees, wild flowers, even the rocks. The ecological concerns of Bond could be plotted in all his works. Nature has become his religion that he follows very earnestly. In the postcolonial novel, "Heart of Darkness", Joseph Conrad narrates the destruction caused by

the colonizers as, “A rocky cliff appeared, mounds of turned-up earth by the shore, houses on a hill, others, with iron roofs, amongst a waste of excavations..... A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation.... I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No changes appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything: but this objectless blasting was all the work going on!” (Heart of Darkness. 16-17). Irrevocable natural catastrophes were done to the environment in the Ganga Yamuna Doab due to which diseases such as malaria flourished, taking the lives of many. Bond spent most of his time wandering along the river banks or exploring the thick deodar and oak forests that cover the slope. Along with the fight for human rights, animal rights have also become pertinent. Every animal has a right to live just like humans. Human and wild animal encounters are due to the reckless deforestation and reducing the boundaries between the two. Wildlife and tigers have been an integral part of Indian history, culture and religion. Bond’s ecological concern echoes the need for tiger conservation and management. Though the wildlife Protection Act, 1972 is a powerful legislation, the hunters and poachers continue to plunder the wealth of the forests. Around hundred years ago, some 100,000 roamed across Asia, including several subspecies that are now extinct. At present, around three thousand tigers are left and if this alarming trend continues, tigers may cease to exist.

Tigers are at the apex of the food chain and for a healthy bio-diversity increased numbers of tigers are essential. Ruskin

Bond's stories are a critique of science and industrialization that has poisoned the rivers, changed their course of flow, unscientific dam constructing activities, have all taken the toll on the ecological system causing deforestation. Laying railway lines through the mountains poses its own challenges, harming the natural attributes of the mountains. Global warming has been resulting in melting of the Himalayan glaciers causing flash floods. In the story, *No Room for a Leopard*, Bond unravels the corruption of the animal skin trade, flourishing illegally, though the government has banned it. Leopard like other members of the cat family is nearing its extinction in India due to deforestation. Many of the projects which are dangerous have got the approval in crucial wild life areas, including within national parks, tiger reserved and elephant corridors. This would drown, disembowel and split tiger reserves, endanger rare species and harms the world heritage bio-diversity sites. Railway lines are intruding the elephant corridors. In September 2010, seven elephants were mowed down by a speeding train at the Mahananda Wild Sanctuary railway track in North Bengal. The elephants were trying to save a calf stuck in the line. Ironically, in a report, this railway line is cited as an elephant corridor.

**Conclusion:** Ruskin Bond narrativizes the importance of solitude and spending quiet time with the nature. The trees, rivers, flora and fauna reciprocate human feelings. Bond implores enrichments and brightness from the master as slopes and fields as his natural surroundings; while as light he accomplishes the entrenched attempted insightfulness of the past cultural digestion. Bond's works addresses the universe in a microcosm and appeals to take initiative to conserve the



environment for the good of our survival. Bond's fiction resembles in having a lung fuel of new mountain oxygen, his relationship with nature is humane. It is in the nature; Bond could feel the warmth, love, care and latent qualities. The minutest of the thing in nature fascinates Bond, whether it is a bumble bee or a frog, a langur or a leopard, captures his fascination. Indeed, it is alarming to learn that if the forests disappear, honey bees will also disappear, and if this happens, with in the following four years, the human race, will face extinction! This is the fragility of our bio-spherical chain. In the absence of honey bees, the major agents of pollination, how could forests flourish? Nature has endowed role for everyone. Our responsibility is to conserve the nature, rather than interrupting its affairs. Bond discusses the anthropogenic climate crisis and the notion of climate emergency, and opens new interpretations of epoch change reviving the idea of existential threats to humanity.

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