

An Ecological Study of Ruskin Bond's *Earthquake*

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Abstract - The present paper focuses on the Ecological study of *Earthquake*. Bond has expressed concerns about deforestation, pollution, and the impact of urbanization on the natural habitats of animals. He has advocated for the protection of wildlife and the preservation of natural spaces for future generations. He has encouraged his readers to develop a deep appreciation for the natural world and to take active steps to protect and preserve the environment. Bond's literary contributions have played a significant role in raising awareness about environmental issues in India. Bond is against the unsystematic development which is destroying the nature. The outcome of that can be in the form of earthquake, tsunami and other natural disasters.

Keywords: Environment, ecology, destruction, consciousness, deforestation.

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INTRODUCTION

Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli in 1934 and grew up in Jamnagar, Dehradun, New Delhi and Shimla. He is one of the most popular writers of Indian English literature who won the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1993. He has also been awarded with Padma Shree in 1999, Delhi Governments' Life Time Achievement Award in 2012, Padma Bhushan in 2014. In the present time he lives in Landour, Mussoorie. His Attachment with the nature particularly in mountains developed his love and concerns towards nature. Most of his works centered on the destruction of nature and its side effects on human beings, nature and environment. He is known for his nature consciousness, nature preservation, ecological concerns, in his writings.

Eco-criticism is the study of literature and ecology. We analyses the literature and illustrate the environmental concerns and examine the perspective of the writer about nature, nature consciousness and nature destruction and their effect on human beings. Ruskin Bond, in his novels, poems, and short stories, shows his deep concern about ecology, nature, nature consciousness and natural destruction. His short stories portray the natural world as a central character which is a part and parcel of human life. He also focuses on the preservation and sustainable development of nature. Most of his short stories have their settings in the foothills of Himalayas. His stories show that the natural disasters are the outcome of deforestations particularly in hills. "Other than deforestation, carelessness of tourists is also responsible for the loss of tress. There are many

cases where trees like oaks, deodars, maples, pines trees and acres of jungles were burnt and destroyed in the fire left undistinguished by the campers." (129)

Ruskin Bond's *Earthquake* is a short story that brings attention to the ecological impacts of natural disaster especially earthquake which is very fatal for socio-economical and biological perspective. The story sets in "Shillong, a busy little town in Cherrapunji hills." (*Earthquake*, 02) This story is subdivided into the following incidents:

1. Grandfather's Bath
2. The First Tremors
3. Earthquake Chaos
4. The Lucky Ones
5. Beginning Again

The story *Earthquake* starts with the description of the normal life of the people of Shillong who are busy in their daily routine. Like is the case with Burman Family. There are five members in the family Grandfather, Grandmother, and their children, Rakesh who is 11 years old, Mukesh who is 06 years old and Dolly who is 03 years old. There is a servant in the house named Mumtaz. The father of the children is Mr. Burman who works on a tea estate a few hundred miles away where there is no School. And the mother of the children has died when Dolly was born. In the first tremor, when the grandfather was bathing and grandmother was in the garden. Rakesh was going to the school, Mukesh

was playing in the garden and Dolly was playing under the staircase with her doll's house.

Bond shows that the animals have sixth sense as they can guess the impending disaster. Animals and birds get the sense about natural calamities.

"The hens began cackling, the dogs barking and the birds shrieking and flapping their wings. The crows in the neighborhood all took wing wheeling wildly overhead and cawing loudly. The chickens flapping around in circle as if they were being chased. Two cats seating on the wall suddenly jumped up and disappeared in opposite directions." (10)

The tremor of earthquake was heard by grandmother and Dolly. Mumtaz who was in the kitchen was frightened and started saving the utensils which started falling. Grandfather, who was bathing and singing loudly, did not notice the first earthquake. Grandmother was suddenly become conscious about the welfare of grand children. They also started thinking to change the location of their house because earthquakes are frequents in their locality. "in the town everyone was talking about the first tremor that had just been felt." (24) That makes the older people remember about the earthquake of thirty years ago that had taken the life of their relatives and friends. Thousands of houses had been demolished and Brahmaputra River was over flooded and crocodiles had entered into the towns and villages. The people don't take the lesson from earlier earthquake. They are continuously misusing natural resources and destroying the nature and beauty of hill stations. That became the cause of the present earthquake and other natural disaster that has taken the lives of number of people.

The next part of the story is "Earthquake Chaos" shows the destruction of nature and whole city of Shillong. Rakesh thought that there would be a holiday because of the first tremor, reached to the cricket ground where all of a "sudden the road tilted and rose up towards him. A second later he found himself sprawling on the ground." (30) Everybody in the ground fell down. They heard a roaring thunderous sound because of half of the hillside fall into lake.

"The earth, along with trees, bushes and rocks simply bulged out and then came crashing down. Dust water rose skywards and at the same time the bed of the lake erupted, rose like a tidal wave and spewed its contents over the sounding plain." (32)

The jail walls are also collapsed but the prisoners were so shocked that they don't dare to escape from the jail. Brahmaputra River's waves also became wild because of the earthquake turmoil. Rakesh saw the waves climbing towards him. "It was about fifty meters away when he scrambled to his feet and ran for the nearest tree... he saw his bicycle swept past." (33-35) Grandfather and Mukesh were eating sweets in the

bazaar, when the earthquake strikes. Because of the earthquake "the bazaar became a crooked bazaar" (36)

"Shops that had been on the left now turned up on the right and vice-versa... The cow had vanished and so had the policeman. A motorcycle had disappeared into a hole in the ground, while a car had mounted the steps of the town hall. A Tonga pony galloped down the middle of the road." (36-37)

But anyhow Grandfather, Burman and Mukesh will be able to save themselves as they were in the streets. The same case was happened to the other members of Burman Family. The complete house of the family had collapsed. Dolly, who was playing outside in the garden says, "Look Granny, the house is falling down. What will happen to my doll's house?" (39) The innocence of the child is represented when she is concerned about the doll's house.

But it is fortunate that no one was inside the house. Not only their house but also the houses of the locality have also been collapsed "as though some unseen giant was blowing them all down." (39)

Everything in the house has turned into the heap of bricks, plasters and stones. Only few things remained in the house. "Here a bit of broken desk or chair, there a bit of torn carpet, a familiar hat, bettered Books, a twisted umbrella." (42) After the earthquake, the main concern of the family is the welfare of their family members.

"Mumtaz's hut was one of the few homes left standing" (45) Bond shows that the huts are more vulnerable than the houses made from bricks and plasters. Grandfather and Mukesh came home to know the welfare of the family. Dolly and Grandmother was safe and moving towards the house of Mumtaz. Grandfather feels relaxed. But now they are concerned about the welfare of Rakesh who went to play cricket. Grandfather says: "If you can keep an eye on Mukesh, I will go and look for him." (45) When he went in search of Rakesh, Grandmother and Mukesh and Dolly started searching the ruins of the house. Dolly's house of the doll has also been broken. There was no toy remained safe.

Rakesh was safe on the tree. When the water has drained away, "Rakesh Peered through the branches of the trees in the general direction of his school. Usually he wanted to know the time. Usually the clock tower above the school building was visible for miles around, but now there was no sign of it." (49) When he comes down from the tree, he searched his bicycle but there was no sign of it. He was also surprised to see the dust coming from the side of the town. Most of the tall buildings of the town have been collapsed. "The town's biggest and most expensive hotel, the Grand Eastern, had tumbled down." (50) There was a number of ambulances to

help the injured people. Rakesh started helping the rescue workers who were clearing the rubble. The same time he felt someone's hand on his shoulder. He was his grandfather. He asks the welfare of his family. He called it an unlucky day. But Grandfather says: "we are the lucky ones! We are alive, aren't we? (53) There are a number of people who have lost their life. Azad who has lost most of his family members and remaining members of his family are in between life and death. One of the relative families of Mumtaz has lost their lives except one eight year old girl. But the Burman family didn't leave the hope to stay in Shillong. They decided to rebuild their home and live in the lap of nature. But this time the house will be built with the small rocks. "We can sway and rock like Mumtaz's hut instead of crashing to the ground." (63)

From an ecological perspective, the earthquake in Bond's story highlights the vulnerability of the natural environment to sudden and unpredictable changes. The destruction caused by the earthquake not only affects human lives, but also damages the flora and fauna of the region. The disruption of the soil and rock formations can lead to landslides and loss of habitat for wildlife, while the shaking of the earth can uproot trees and disturb the balance of the ecosystem.

Additionally, Bond's portrayal of the aftermath of the earthquake sheds light on the resilience of nature. Despite the devastation, life begins to resurface as nature slowly starts to heal itself. This resilience is a testament to the ability of the natural environment to recover and adapt in the face of adversity.

In conclusion, "*Earthquake*" by Ruskin Bond emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, and serves as a reminder of the fragility of the natural world in the face of natural disasters. It highlights the need for a greater understanding and appreciation of the ecological impact of such events, and the importance of coexisting with nature in a sustainable and harmonious manner. Today the whole world is suffering from ecological hazards like deforestation, soil erosion, depletion of ozone layer, extinction of wildlife forms, frequent earthquakes and thundering, untimely rain, drought, flood, forest fire, rising of temperature, melting of glaciers and consequently rising of sea level etc. As the situation is so alarming the solution is being searched in every sphere of knowledge. Many of the subjects like economics, geography, sociology, anthropology and literature have come together to solve this problem. As an environmental movement Eco-criticism was started in USA in 1980s spread to Europe and Asian countries, including India in a small time. Caroline Merchant in *Death of Nature* emphasizes that "the development of the idea that nature was passive, tendered it freely open to manipulation by western societies." (Hall, 159)

Arup Pal in the article "Green Corners: An Eco-critical Reading of Ruskin Bond's Selected Short Stories" talks about "Ruskin Bond whose works play a major role in rethinking our attitudes towards nature. They uphold moral consciousness by criticizing our

anthropocentric attitudes. As a social activist, Bond stands against our morbid lifestyle and fights for sustaining ecological harmony. The scenic settings of Dehra, Mussoorie and Landour in his writings invariably show his deep-rooted faith in the healing power of nature." (125)

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