

# Ecological Concerns in the Select Short Stories of Ruskin Bond

Meenu Kashyap<sup>1\*</sup> Dr. Punam Pandit<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, S.S.V. PG College, Hapur

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor

**Abstract – "I am able to claim a relationship with the trees, wild flowers, even the rocks that are an integral part of it. Yesterday, at twilight, when I passed beneath a canopy of oak leaves, I felt that I was a part of the forest. I put my hand and touched the bark of an old tree, and as I turned away, its leaves brushed against my face, as if to acknowledge me."**

**Rain in the Mountains (197)**

**The term Ecocide is derived from the Latin word 'Oikos meaning house or home and the Latin word 'Caedere' meaning strike down or demolish, wipe out or devastate. The literal meaning is to annihilate home or house. In the context of nature, it can be defined as the eradication or extermination of ecology and the environment. Uttarakhand is suffering from massive ecological destruction such as deforestation, extinction of wildlife, drying up natural resources of water, demolition of mountains, pollution of our great rivers like Ganges and Yamuna, rising of temperature, and consequently spreading of diseases like malaria, flood, and untimely rain. The great rivers of India the Ganga and Yamuna no longer carry the life rejuvenating water, they have been declared dead by the experts. So many long-lasting and aged are being cut for widening the roads and commercial purposes, mostly for mercenary benefits jeopardizing human and nonhuman life forms.**

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Chandi Prasad Bhatt, a great environmentalist, and savior of nature observes deforestation as one of the biggest reasons for ecological destruction. In his book Parvat Parvat Basti Basti, Bhatt asserts that the loss of forest is the great cause of environmental deterioration. Soil erosion is continued, not only due to forest fire that is caused every year and some other reasons too. So many jungles are being caused to be commodious and thin. On account of all this, the capacity of trees to absorb the Co2 will be less and soil erosion will also be increased.

Floods have become the very identity of Uttrakhand, as due to human intervention the mountains have become sensitive. We are becoming a witness to severe and drastic destruction caused by floods. On account of the over-slaughtering of certain animals they proving as to the relics of the past like dinosaurs. Interestingly after some time, we would be researching about their reason of extinction from the earth as we are spending a lot of money and research on the pollution of sacred Ganga, after doing tremendous damage to it. Is Corona the result of all the interruptions we made to our environment in the name of development and progress?

Ruskin Bond is a torchbearer who is leading the people towards the preservation and protection of nature. Nature is his religion that he follows very earnestly. He believes in the rehabilitating and restoring power of nature that bestows us with food, water, lodging, wealth, happiness, almost everything is supplied to us by the compassionate mother. Bond exhorts us off and on how unfortunately we have taken for granted our most precious riches i.e. nature. We are exhausting all the bounty of nature without any care and concern, and have forgotten about the detrimental results of such negligence on the part of nature which is proving to be so deleterious to human and non-life forms. Nature is here to be loved, cared for, nourished, protected, preserved, and praised. Instead of performing our expected role we are plundering and damaging nature remorselessly. If nature can soothe us, it also has such natural calamities as flood, famine, earthquakes, the typhoon that Bond shows in his famous story The Angry River. Nature functions according to its system, it provides, takes away, and provides once again. Humans come and go but nature is permanent to bless, rejoice and heal us. We must always remember this fact that if nature fosters us as a benevolent mothers it has also the capacity to crush us. Unfortunately, we have lost our

sense of belonging to nature which is the very reality of modernization.

Ruskin Bond is said to be the William Wordsworth of India. In this story, "The Crooked Tree" Ruskin Bond describes his friendship with a boy named Kamal and a crooked tree. Bond and Kamal met the tree when they were cycling out of Shahganj. Both the friends were cycling out of Shahganj to enjoy their time; they rode off through paddy and maize fields and reached near a crooked tree grown near an old well. The tree was very inviting to them as it had a crooked trunk and branches were laden with thick, broad, and crooked leaves similar to those used in the markets to sell food. Except for providing shade to humans and nonhumans, it gives shelter to birds too. The crookedness of the tree is twofold, suggesting its deformity as well as uniqueness. The crookedness of the tree is symbolic of those creatures that support others despite their own limitations. The tree trunk had a hole and out of it flew some parrots. The old well had grass around its parapet that was trimmed short by cattle grazing. It reminds us of a time when we used to enjoy idyllic nature without caring about the speed of time and worries of the world. In this blind and powerful race, we have left something behind that was very precious and a true part of us. We have been enthralled by materialism and don't have the courage and vigor to confront and overcome this enemy. This pragmatism and utilitarianism have destroyed our ethical responsibility not only towards nature but also towards ourselves. We don't know where this mammon worship will lead us or still we can withdraw from this cursed route. The stories of Bond always inspire us to retreat and save our most valuable asset. Here William Wordsworth Poem, 'World is too Much with us' is very much appropriate,

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;

Little we see in Nature that is ours;"(The World is Too Much With Us)

The story is very nostalgic of our golden old days when our agricultural fields were filled with natural beauty and natural resources and no machinery was needed to maintain our health and wealth. That had a twofold purpose to serve, on the one hand physically we were detoxified and on the other hand, ecology was reinvigorated.

Trees have always been a very significant topic for Bond and he has ceaselessly been writing about the need to save them. No story of him is deprived of nature, directly or indirectly he discusses the catastrophe coming to us, due to deforestation. Since his childhood has been very painful on account of the unharmonious relationship of his parents and the untimely death of his father, trees always gave him love, care, companionship, and rootedness. Trees are always here to soothe and heal him. Trees are not

only a representative of nature in his works but as a protagonist in itself. They provide him the essential cause to lead his life happily and purposefully. They are the guardian of his spirit and competent enough to guide and motivate him optimistically. It seems he is answerable only to these faithful and loyal friends that follow his conscience everywhere. Bond says,

"The trees stand watch over my day-to-day life. They are the guardians of my conscience. I have no one else to answer to, so I live and work under the generous but highly principled supervision of the trees—especially the deodars, who stand on guard, unbending, on the slopes above the cottage. The oak and maples are a little more tolerant, they have had to put up with a great deal, their branches continually lopped for fuel and fodder. "What would they think?" I ask myself on many an occasion. 'What would they like me to do? And I do what I think they would approve of most!" (Rain in the Mountains, 3)

The story is a critique of science and Industrialization that has destroyed our traditional system of irrigation. Gone are the days when we could enjoy the water from Rahat that does not make use either of electricity or any other machine.

Both the friends sat in the shade of the tree and relished the food that they brought from home. After taking their food they laid down under the tree to stretch themselves and felt the different aspects of nature like the singing of crickets, cooing of pigeons, fluttering of parrots, the distant sound of a plane, the breathing of Kamal, the smell of grass and brick around the well and the promise of rain. He discovered a treasure in the form of an old well where he drank the sweet and clean water,

Bond is very sensitive to the different types of sounds and smells as the chirping of birds, the whispering of trees and plants, the murmuring of brooks, soft sound of a falling petal. Since he is a nature worshipper, it's very inherent of him to cherish the fellowship of those who live in the lap of nature. Many times we have seen him sharing the food and enjoying the company of people who live in the lap of nature. He does not discriminate between the high and low and between the educated and uneducated. Like a watered cloud he floats leisurely and drizzles somewhere and somewhere makes a heavy downpour of his sweet and docile behavior. Bond writes,

"I went to the well, and put my shoulders to the ancient handle, turned the wheel, moving it around while cool, clean water gushed out over the stones and along the channel to the fields. The discovery that I could water a field, that I had the power to make things grow, gave me a thrill of satisfaction; it was like writing a story that had the ring of truth. I

drank from one of the trays; the water was sweet with age" (p, 29).

In the story, "The Tunnel", Bond shows the quiet atmosphere of the forest and his love for animals and trees. Suraj a young boy cycled out of Dehra to see the rail engine of his dream, except watching the black and golden dragon snorting and puffing out black smoke and sparks, he experienced a lot of things too of jungle life. He is not aware of a friendship that is there between the watchman and a leopard. The watchman is a through celebrator of nature, near his hut he has maintained a small kitchen garden that has marigolds and a small patch of vegetables. The warm welcome of the watchman evaporates all the lackadaisical thoughts from the mind of Suraj and made him comfortable with him. The watchman asked Suraj,

"Why are you inspecting my tunnel?"

Is it your tunnel? Asked Suraj.

It is, said the watchman. It is truly my tunnel since no one else will have anything to do with it". (66-67)

This conversation reflects the love and concern for the forest of watchman and the curiosity of Suraj. When Suraj told the watchman about the movement of an animal, while he was coming out of the tunnel. The watchman replied with convection,

"It was a leopard you saw, said the watchman. My leopard; Do you own a leopard too?"

I do.

And do you land it to the government? I do not. Is it dangerous?

No, it's a leopard that minds its own business. It comes to this range for a few days every month" (67)

This conversation is suggestive of my things, the love of Sunder Singh for the animal, the curiosity of the young boy regarding an animal, and the implication of handling the animal to the government.

Nature provides a peaceful and soothing abode to those who come to it after the buffeting and hue and cry of cities. Sometimes, when monotony prevails over our existence due to living in the sophisticated homes of marble and glass, we love to depart in the forests and hills. Perhaps it is symbolic of our primitive self. It's an infelicitous reality of city life where machines dominate over humans. It projects our future which is based on different apparatuses. Sunder Singh asked Suraj to come and see the night mail at 9 o, clock at night. Since Suraj is a town-bred boy, he is not aware of the jungle life and was terrified to think about nighttime. To clarify his doubt about coming to the forest at the night, he asked Sunder Singh,

"Will it be safe?"

Of Course, it is safer in the jungle than in the town. Nothing happens out here. But last month, I went into the town. I was almost run over by a bus." (67)

The discrimination indicates the tranquil and harmonious life of the jungle, while the competitive and aggressive life of cities and towns where nobody cares for nobody. People are in a race to supersede others without concern for anyone else. The bus driver might have killed Sunder Singh, had he not stabilized himself steadily.

Sunder Singh is the epitome of those simple and genuine people who are influenced and benefited by the rejuvenating effect of nature. He is free from all the hustle-bustle and madding effect of artificial things. He put the banana leaves over his eyes and slept. The hot earth was being cooled by the light breeze that blew among the trees. It brought with it the revitalizing fragrance of mango blooms and the coming of rains. Perhaps this fragrance lulled Sunder Singh to deep and sound sleep.

In the world of Ruskin Bond, the trees are not the static beings; they seem to be moving when their good wishers and lover desires it. They are the human entity that comes to hug their friends. At night Sunder Singh lit the oil lamp and went to inspect the tunnel. Suraj was undergoing an epiphanic experience of the jungle life that he never encountered. Nature was unfolding itself marvelously. Suraj was overwhelmed as;

"In the dark, the trees seem to move closer to him. And the nightlife of the forest was conveyed on the breeze the sharp call of a barking deer, the cry of a fox, and the quaint tonk-tonk of a nightjar. ... Sounds that come from the trees, creaking and whispering, as though the tree were coming to life, stretching their arms limb in the dark, shifting a little, flexing their fingers." (68)

By a sawing sound, the leopard got registered his presence there in the tunnel. Sunder Singh was anxious to think about the arrival of the train and Suraj was tensed about the proximity of the animal. Sunder Singh is a conservator of nature as he does his best to save its inhabitants and subjects. Anyhow he wanted to drive out the leopard from the tunnel as he might be killed if he would not be saved. Suraj was concerned with his own fate. Being a wild animal leopard could attack them but Sunder Singh assured him, "Not this leopard. It knows me well. We have seen each other many times. It has a weakness of goats and stray dogs, but it will not harm us." (68) It was crouching in the tracks, perhaps like [Sunder and Suraj to protect himself. With the tearing shouting the leopard disappear to the jungle swiftly.

Colonization has been a great force in destroying not only the culture, education system, and tradition but also the environment and ecology of India. In certain parts of India, the environmental and ecological evils

are the direct result of selfish and deceitful colonial policies. The policies were fabricated to execute such purposes as revenue extraction, expansion of agricultural lands, and sleepers for railways. The irrigation system and construction of dams during the colonial periods led to environmental degradation. This forced the villagers to cut the trees and turn the forest areas into agricultural and grassy lands.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator describes the natural 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)

Irreversible natural catastrophes were done to the environment in the Ganga Yamuna Doab due to which such disease as malaria was given the chance to flourish in the area taking the lives of so many people by the ruthless act of deforestation.

The present story "Wilson's Bridge" suggests the irreparable loss caused by imperialists. Though apparently, it is a tragic love story but is filled with irrelevant deforestation of the Himalayas. Bond describes the story of one British Wilson and a hill woman Gulabi who committed suicide by jumping into the river due to the infidelity of Wilson, her lover who became her husband later on. Taking benefit of his position as a British officer, he made so many houses in the valley of Doon by damaging so much of its forest and ecology. "In a few years he had made a fortune. He builds a large timbered house at Haril, another in Dehradun and a third at Mussoorie."(161)

It seems as to be the fortunate tale of a colonist but Wilson symbolizes those pitiless and heartless imperialist forces that destroyed the ecology of the Himalayas. To plunder the raw material from India, The Britishers laid down the railway lines and constructed so many bridges. Wilson also built a bridge at the river Bhagirathi over the gorges of Gangotri. The area is filled with splendid natural beauty. It has a different type of flora and fauna to add to its splendor. But the ruthless exploitation of nature is the stark reality of the region. The imperialist has left their strong imprints of ecological imbalance. Deforestation has become a universal problem, the wounds colonial powers gave us; still, we are unable to heal it. Continuously so much old and strong trees which took so many years to grow, are being cut carelessly. Bond says,

"I spent most of my time wandering along the river banks or exploring the thick Deodar and Oak forests that cover the slopes. It was these trees that had made a fortune for Wilson and his patron, the raja of Tehri. They had exploited the great forests to the full, floating huge logs to the downstream to the timber yards in the plains." (160)

It is not only the outsiders that harmed our ecology but our people too had damaged our environment for some monetary benefits. It's very ironic and regretful to think how our powerful and responsible people could not evaluate the results of such malpractices. The people like the Raja of Tehri are responsible for the destruction of nature in the region of the Himalayas. These people surrendered themselves fully to the selfish needs and desires of the outsiders and let them loot and butcher our natural resources.

In the Indian context, Hunting has been a very significant factor in shaping history and legends. Presently so much harm has been meted out to nature in killing animals and nonhuman life forms which is against humanitarian rules and ethics. In many of his stories Bond has shown animal killing. In the story "No Room for a Leopard" Bond unravels the corruption of the animal skin trade which is flourishing illegally, though the government has banned it. The hunters whispered to Bond, "Leopard skins were selling in Delhi at over a thousand rupees each! Of course there was a ban on the export of its skin but they gave me to understand that there were ways and means." (21)

Earlier we used to discuss human rights but presently the rights of nonhuman life forms have also become important. Due to the over the killing of certain species like tiger, leopard, neelgiri Thar, snow leopard, dolphin, Gharial, and Blackbuck, etc have been declared as to be endangered in India. Because of deforestation animals are being forced to run from their homes in search of security, but ironically that optimism of safety is proving fatal to their lives. Bond tries to sensitize people towards murdering and butchering against nonhuman life forms.

"Leopard like other members of the cat family is nearing its extinction in India and I was surprised to find one so close in Mussoorie. Probably the deforestation that had driven the deer into this green valley and the leopard had naturally followed". (19)

It's very unfortunate that hunting has been glorified as a game of royal classes and some of the kings got built hunting sites too in the vicinity of their territorial forests. To name a few Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II of Jaipur had a hunting ground Ranthambore to hunt animals like leopard, Neelgiri, wild boar, and chital. The Nawab of Juna Garh has a private hunting area for killing lions. Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir had a private park to kill musk deer, Himalayan weasels, and hill foxes. The

Maharaja of Cooch Berar and the raja of Gouripur owned a hunting park at the bank of river Manas to hunt tigers and elephants. Later on, all these hunting sites were declared as national parks to save the jeopardized breeds. During the regime of Mughal emperors, hunting was a big pass time and passion. Mughal emperor, Jalal-uddin Muhamaad had a big passion for hunting. He started a tradition of royal hunting. Paintings of the era depict the Rajputs, Afghans, and Mongols hunting from horsebacks and elephants. These excursions were regarded as heroic adventurous, audacious, and exotic sports, and tigers were the supreme trophies. During the British raj to hunting was a big game. Through this tormenting recreation, they exhibited their power, masculinity, virility, royalty, and machismo. They went in the big parties of 10 20 or even 30 to kill innocent creatures and legitimize the slaughters by denigrating the different animals as horrendous and thirsty for human blood. After coming to the throne in 1911 king George V of Britain and killed 39 tigers within 10 days. These types of killing continued until 1966 Indra Gandhi became the prime minister of India and declared herself as the greatest wildlife savior. She trailblazed combat against the growing risky crisis of tigers and in 1969 banned the exports of skins and even went to the extent of appointing a 'tiger task force' in 1973.

The falsified representation of bravery and worldly knowledge and maturity is also one of the reasons for hunting and killing. In the royal classes, the newly enthroned kings were supposed to kill animals especially tigers. Slaughtering a tiger was a coming of age ceremony of young Indian kings and princes.

The British officer Wilson also represents such colonial bureaucrats who came to India not only to loot and plunder its material bounty but also its natural riches too. He traveled in many parts of India and the Himalayas and used its natural property to benefit himself and his country. Ruskin writes,

"The old wooden bridge has gone and today an iron suspension bridge straddles the Bhagirathi as it rushes down the gouge below Gangotri.... Hunting has its limitations and Wilson found it more profitable to tap the reasons the great forest wealth." (60-61)

Ruskin Bond is a crusader against the destruction of nature. For almost five decades he has been fighting for the cause of nature through his writings that are being read by a majority of the people. He is firm to restore nature in its pristine form, his vision may be difficult but not impossible to achieve.

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#### **Corresponding Author**

**Meenu Kashyap\***

Research Scholar, S.S.V. PG College, Hapur

[kshyapuni@gmail.com](mailto:kshyapuni@gmail.com)