



Nature as a Teacher: Ecological Values in Ruskin Bond's Selected Stories

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Abstract:

*Ruskin Bond's writings are deeply rooted in the Himalayan landscape, where nature is not merely a backdrop but a living force that shapes human consciousness. This research article examines the concept of nature as a teacher in Bond's stories, focusing on *The Cherry Tree* and *Dust on the Mountain*. Through an ecocritical framework, the study explores how natural elements such as trees, mountains, and landscapes function as agents of moral, emotional, and ecological learning. Bond's narratives emphasize patience, resilience, interdependence, and environmental responsibility, presenting nature as a guide that nurtures ethical awareness. The article also investigates how childhood experiences in nature foster ecological sensitivity and how Bond critiques modernization through environmental loss. Ultimately, the study argues that Bond's stories serve as ecological texts that educate readers about sustainable living and harmonious coexistence with the natural world.*

Keywords: *Ecocriticism, Ruskin Bond, Ecological Values, Nature As Teacher, Himalayas, Environmental Ethics.*

Introduction

Ecocriticism, as an interdisciplinary field, examines the relationship between literature and the environment, highlighting how literary texts reflect ecological consciousness and ethical responsibility (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). In Indian English literature, Ruskin Bond occupies a unique position as a writer whose works are inseparable from the Himalayan environment. His stories consistently depict nature as an active presence that influences human life, shaping emotions, values, and identity.

Unlike industrial narratives that portray nature as a resource to be exploited, Bond's works emphasize learning from nature. His stories suggest that mountains, forests, and trees are not passive entities but teachers that impart wisdom about life, resilience, and coexistence. This perspective aligns with the principles of deep ecology, which advocate a non-hierarchical relationship between humans and nature (Naess, 1973).

Objectives: This research article focuses on two significant works—*The Cherry Tree* and *Dust on the Mountain*—to analyze how Bond presents nature as a pedagogical force. Through these texts, the study explores how ecological values are internalized by characters and conveyed to readers.

Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism and Environmental Ethics

Ecocriticism foregrounds the intrinsic interconnectedness between human beings and the natural environment, challenging anthropocentric ideologies that position humans as superior to all other forms of life. As Buell (1995) suggests, literature plays a vital role in shaping ecological consciousness by representing the environment not merely as a passive backdrop but as an active participant in human experience. In this context, Garrard (2012) further emphasizes that literary texts contribute significantly to the development of environmental imagination and ethical responsibility, encouraging readers to rethink their relationship with nature.

The idea of nature as a teacher is closely aligned with the philosophy of deep ecology, which advocates a shift from domination to coexistence with the natural world (Naess, 1973). Deep ecology promotes the understanding that all living beings possess intrinsic value, independent of their utility to humans. Complementing this perspective, environmental ethics underscores the moral responsibility of humans to preserve ecological balance and respect biodiversity (Heise, 2008). Ruskin Bond's stories reflect these theoretical principles by presenting nature as a source of wisdom, guidance, and ethical reflection, thereby fostering a deeper awareness of environmental sustainability and harmonious living.

The Cherry Tree: Lessons of Patience and Growth

Nature as a Symbol of Life and Resilience: Ruskin Bond's *The Cherry Tree* presents a simple yet profound narrative centered on a young boy, Rakesh, who plants a cherry seed and patiently observes its transformation into a tree. The story highlights the slow and organic process of natural growth, emphasizing the resilience of life in the face of adversity. The cherry tree survives multiple challenges, including harsh climatic conditions, grazing animals, and human interference, thereby symbolizing the enduring strength of nature.

In this narrative, the tree emerges as a "living teacher," illustrating that growth is not instantaneous but requires patience, persistence, and care. The repeated setbacks faced by the tree do not hinder its development; rather, they reinforce its capacity to adapt and survive. This portrayal resonates with ecocritical perspectives that underscore the resilience and adaptability of natural systems (Garrard, 2012). By depicting nature as a dynamic and self-sustaining entity, Bond encourages readers to appreciate the inherent strength and continuity of life.

Childhood Learning and Ecological Awareness: The relationship between Rakesh and the cherry tree exemplifies the importance of childhood experiences in shaping ecological awareness. Through his interaction with the tree, Rakesh develops a sense of curiosity, responsibility, and emotional attachment to the natural world. His engagement is not limited to passive observation; rather, it involves active participation, care, and sustained attention.

This process of experiential learning aligns with the principles of environmental education, which emphasize direct engagement with nature as a means of fostering ecological sensitivity (Buell, 1995). Rakesh gradually learns that nature operates according to its own rhythms and cannot be controlled or accelerated by human intervention. The tree thus becomes a medium through which he internalizes values such as patience, respect, and responsibility, illustrating how nature functions as an effective pedagogical force.

Interdependence Between Humans and Nature: A significant aspect of *The Cherry Tree* is its depiction of the interdependent relationship between humans and nature. While Rakesh nurtures the tree by planting and protecting it, the tree, in turn, enriches his life by providing joy, companionship, and a sense of achievement. This reciprocal relationship reflects a biocentric worldview, where humans are seen as part of a larger ecological system rather than its dominant force (Naess, 1973).

Bond's portrayal of this mutual dependence underscores the importance of harmony and balance in human-nature interactions. The story suggests that human well-being is closely linked to the health of the natural environment, reinforcing the idea that coexistence, rather than exploitation, is essential for sustainable living. In this way, *The Cherry Tree* not only narrates a story of growth but also imparts a deeper ecological lesson about interconnectedness and responsibility.

Dust on the Mountain: Nature as a Moral Guide

Conflict Between Development and Ecology: Ruskin Bond's *Dust on the Mountain* offers a complex ecological narrative that foregrounds the tension between industrial development and environmental preservation. The story centers on Bisnu, a young boy who becomes a witness to the destructive consequences of quarrying activities in the Himalayan region. Through vivid descriptions of the landscape, Bond illustrates how human intervention disrupts the natural balance, reducing once-lush mountains into barren, dust-laden terrains.

In this context, nature assumes the role of a moral teacher, exposing the long-term consequences of ecological exploitation. The pervasive dust becomes a powerful symbol of environmental degradation, representing not only physical destruction but also the loss of ecological harmony. Bond's critique of modernization challenges the dominant notion of progress that privileges economic gain over environmental sustainability, aligning with broader ecocritical concerns regarding the ethical implications of development (Heise, 2008).

Environmental Awareness and Ethical Responsibility: Through Bisnu's lived experiences, the narrative cultivates a strong sense of environmental awareness. The gradual transformation of the mountain from a vibrant ecosystem into a desolate, dusty expanse underscores the fragility of nature and the irreversible impact of human actions. This transformation serves as a cautionary tale, urging readers to reflect on the consequences of ecological neglect.

The story resonates with ecocritical perspectives that emphasize environmental ethics and the need for responsible stewardship of natural resources (Garrard, 2012). By portraying the direct effects of environmental destruction on both nature and human life, Bond highlights the interconnectedness of ecological and social well-being. The narrative thus reinforces the idea that sustainable practices are not merely desirable but essential for maintaining ecological balance.

Nature as a Source of Reflection and Change: Despite its depiction of environmental degradation, *Dust on the Mountain* also presents nature as a space for introspection and transformation. Bisnu's journey through the altered landscape leads to a deeper understanding of ecological interconnectedness and the consequences of human intervention. This reflective process underscores the potential for change and renewal, even in the face of destruction.

In this sense, nature functions as a teacher not only through its beauty but also through its suffering. The loss of ecological balance becomes a powerful lesson that fosters awareness and ethical responsibility. Bond thus suggests that environmental crises, while destructive, can also serve as catalysts for change, encouraging individuals to adopt more sustainable ways of living.

Comparative Analysis of the Two Stories

Positive vs. Negative Pedagogy of Nature: A comparative reading of *The Cherry Tree* and *Dust on the Mountain* reveals two contrasting yet complementary modes of ecological pedagogy. While *The Cherry Tree* portrays nature as a nurturing and life-affirming teacher that imparts values such as patience and perseverance, *Dust on the Mountain* presents nature as a teacher through loss, destruction, and ecological

crisis. Together, these narratives offer a holistic understanding of how nature educates human beings—both through growth and through warning.

Role of Childhood Perspective: Both stories foreground young protagonists, emphasizing the significance of childhood in shaping ecological consciousness. Rakesh and Bisnu, through their interactions with nature, develop a heightened sensitivity to environmental processes and changes. Their openness, curiosity, and emotional engagement enable them to internalize ecological values more effectively than adults, reflecting the idea that early experiences with nature are crucial in fostering long-term environmental awareness.

Ecological Values and Sustainability: Collectively, the two stories articulate a set of fundamental ecological values that align with the principles of sustainability and environmental ethics. *The Cherry Tree* emphasizes patience, growth, and resilience, illustrating the importance of nurturing and respecting natural processes. In contrast, *Dust on the Mountain* highlights responsibility and awareness, drawing attention to the consequences of environmental degradation. Both narratives underscore the principle of interdependence, reinforcing the idea that humans and nature exist in a mutually sustaining relationship.

Nature as a Pedagogical Force

Ruskin Bond's stories foreground nature as an active and dynamic pedagogical force that shapes human values, emotions, and behavior. Rather than functioning as a passive object of observation, nature in his narratives becomes a living teacher whose lessons are internalized through direct experience. This experiential mode of learning makes ecological understanding more profound and enduring, as it emerges organically from interaction rather than abstract instruction. As Buell (1995) suggests, environmental literature often derives its power from its ability to embed ecological awareness within lived experience, a feature that is clearly evident in Bond's works.

Through his storytelling, Bond illustrates how nature imparts essential life lessons. The slow and steady growth of natural elements teaches patience, while the ability of plants and landscapes to endure adversity reflects resilience. The vastness and complexity of the natural world cultivate a sense of humility, reminding humans of their limited place within a larger ecological system. At the same time, the visible consequences of environmental disruption instill a sense of responsibility, emphasizing the ethical obligation to preserve ecological balance. These values resonate with ecocritical principles that advocate a shift from human-centered thinking to a more inclusive, biocentric perspective (Garrard, 2012).

In this context, Bond's portrayal of nature challenges modern educational paradigms that often prioritize theoretical knowledge over experiential learning. His narratives suggest that meaningful education must involve engagement with the natural world, where learners develop sensitivity, awareness, and ethical responsibility through lived interaction. By positioning nature as a teacher, Bond not only enriches literary discourse but also offers an alternative vision of education rooted in ecological consciousness.

Critique of Modernization and Environmental Degradation

Alongside his celebration of nature's pedagogical role, Ruskin Bond's narratives present a subtle yet powerful critique of modernization and its adverse impact on fragile ecosystems. His works frequently depict the tension between development and environmental preservation, highlighting how industrial activities disrupt ecological balance and lead to irreversible damage. *Dust on the Mountain*, in particular, exemplifies this critique by portraying the destructive effects of quarrying on the Himalayan landscape, where natural beauty is replaced by dust, noise, and desolation.

This representation aligns with ecocritical perspectives that question the sustainability of modern development and its underlying assumptions of progress (Heise, 2008). Bond challenges the idea that economic growth should come at the expense of environmental health, drawing attention to the long-term

consequences of ecological exploitation. His narratives reveal that such development not only degrades the environment but also undermines human well-being, as the loss of natural resources leads to social and emotional dislocation.

At the same time, Bond's works advocate a more balanced and sustainable approach to development, one that respects the limits of nature and prioritizes ecological harmony. By emphasizing coexistence rather than domination, his stories align with broader environmental ethics that call for responsible stewardship of the natural world (Garrard, 2012). In doing so, Bond transforms his literary narratives into a form of ecological critique and advocacy, urging readers to reconsider their relationship with nature in an era of environmental crisis.

Conclusion

Ruskin Bond's *The Cherry Tree* and *Dust on the Mountain* exemplify how nature can function as a powerful teacher, imparting essential ecological values and ethical insights. Through these stories, Bond presents a vision of the natural world as a source of wisdom, resilience, and moral guidance. In an era marked by environmental crisis and climate change, Bond's writings remain highly relevant. They remind readers of the importance of reconnecting with nature and learning from its rhythms and processes. By portraying nature as a teacher, Bond not only enriches literary discourse but also contributes to the broader movement of environmental awareness and sustainability. Ultimately, his stories encourage a shift from exploitation to coexistence, urging humanity to recognize its place within the larger ecological system.

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