



ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN RUSKIN BOND'S SHORT STORIES

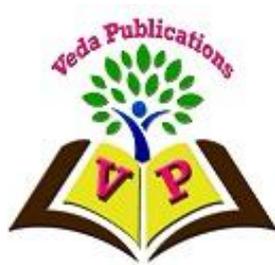
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ABSTRACT



Environmental ethics found for awareness, sprang from environmental crisis. Environmental concerns and issues associated with it affect people across the globe, the universe. The reason for the immediate crisis is due to the lack of unawareness regarding the protection of ecology. As people have become self-centred, only very few take steps to make the environment clean and green. Over the past two decades we have seen a gradual increase in the number of writers writing about issues related to environmental concerns. Ecocriticism is an approach of literary criticism that aims to study the connection between Ecology and Literature. This paper examines the Ecological Concern in Ruskin Bond selected short stories.

Keywords: *Ecocriticism, Ecological concern, Dust on the Mountains, My Father's Trees in Dehra, Death of the Trees, The Leopard.*

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INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism, an important statement made by Cheryl Glotfelty, the founder of the American Association for Literature & Environment (ASLE), describes the focus of ecocriticism in the following terms:

“While in most literary theory ‘the world’ is synonymous with society – the social sphere – ecocriticism expands the notion of ‘the world’ to include the entire ecosphere.”(1)

The primary concern of ecocriticism, to use an agreed definition, is thus to study “the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”(2) One important feature attached to ecocriticism should not be disregarded: it was born from the environmental crisis, awareness of which has affected many literary critics and scholars since the 1980s (3). There has been a growing number of ecocritical publications from the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Environmental ethics could be defined as “a set of principles, values or norms relating to the ways in which we interact with our [natural] environment.” If we look at this area of concern, we can easily recognize that there are some striking characteristics which ecocriticism and environmental ethics have in common. Like ecocriticism, environmental ethics sprang from the environmental crisis. “Environmental ethics’ is essentially a response to a range of environmental problems which collectively make up the ‘environmental crisis’. So, one could say that the environmental crisis has haunted literary critics and philosophers alike. In this paper researcher has been chosen Ruskin Bond’s *Dust on the Mountains, My Father’s Trees in Dehra, Death of the Trees, The Leopard* short stories for this study.

Ruskin Bond is one of the most popular recent Indian writers in English. Ruskin bond is true love of nature. Nature and ecology is one of the dominant themes in his works. One finds Wordsworth’s pantheistic philosophy in Ruskin Bond that is presence of life or spirit in every object of nature like trees, plants, rivers. He lives in Mussoorie, at the foothills of the Himalaya. The region is blessed with an abundance of natural beauty, flora and fauna. Bond is worried about destroy of the natural environment in the name of development. His deep

concerned is depicted his short stories. Writing with love, his pure, innocent characters represent his love for nature. They interact with animals, trees and flowers; they reflect his concern and his effort to preserve the environment through tree plantation. The stories highlight the duty and responsibility to the environment.

The aim of this paper is to highlight how Ruskin Bond has expressed his concern for nature which has been exploited by human beings in the name of urbanisation and modernisation and how the harmful effects of humans' exploitation of nature directly affect human life and living space. This paper also studies the under realm of literary theory of Ecocriticism.

Bond’s *Dust on the Mountains* is the story of a young boy Binsu, lives with his younger sister and mother in a very small village of Tehri Garhwal. The village is in the hills, right in the lap of nature surrounded by oak, deodar, maple, pine and apricot trees, working hard on his farmland. But a certain year, the lack of monsoon forces him to look for work in mussoorie a big city. He gets a job in a cinema hall as a tea seller during the interval, where he meets two other friends Chittru and Bali. They all become friends and work together as per the orders. However Chittru and Bisnu become close friends as they sleep in air corridor at night.

Bisnu gets the job of a cleaner boy for Pritam, the truck driver who carries limestone from the quarry to the depot. They work for the mine site where deforestation and blasting of mountains are common for lime powder. When they did see the mountain, they found that the top of it was missing blasted away by dynamite to enable quarries to get at the rich strata of lime stones rock below the surface. Binsu feels for the trees that have been knocked down and the land that has been raided of its natural beauty as it is stripped of its treasures for human benefit. The quarry industry makes air, water and sound pollution. Bond writes:

...they were nearing the quarries when they saw clouds of dust hanging in the air. The dust hid the next mountain from view. When they did see the mountain, they found that the top of it was missing. ... blasted away by dynamite to enable the quarries to get at the rich strata



of limestone rock below the surface. The skeletons of a few trees remained on the lower slopes. Almost everything had gone. ...grass, flowers, shrubs, birds, butterflies, grasshoppers, ladybird. A rock lizard popped its head out of a crevice to look at the intruders. Then, like some prehistoric survivor, it scuttled back into its underground shelter. (496)

The flora and fauna of the region are violently dislocated and killed. At the blast of the dynamite, rocks and trees are thrown as under. Bond emerges as an environmentalist explaining the importance of trees an important characteristic of his stories dealing with environmental concern.

Human activities towards nature not only terrified Bisnu but also affected our ecosystem. Even the delicious wild strawberries, those which Chittru and his friend would eat were destroyed. The demise of forest panicked Bisnu who is habituated with green mountains at his village and not with desert-like dart. When asked about the condition of trees at his village, Bisnu, as if in a voice of protest, complains to Pritam Singh: 'Nobody has started blasting the hills as yet' (499).

Having approached to the quarries, Bisnu was shocked watching combustion of shrubs and small trees. The speculation of the same fate of the tress at his village frightened him. Just as the story begins with hope, it ends in hope. It was at the end of the tale that a worldly person like Pritam Singh realized the life-saving power of trees, after when his truck met an accident and was salvaged by an Oak tree. Pritam Singh's life made Bisnu and Pritam to rethink; Bisnu decided to return home and start harvesting: 'I'll work on my land. It's better to grow things on the land, than to blast thing out of it' (502).

Bond's another eco-concern short story, *My Father's Trees in Dehra*, depicts the author's visit to Dehra after many years. The climate of Dehra was humid and the landscape was green with a wide variety of trees. His father loved trees and planted many. His father not only planted trees in his own garden, but also in the woods around Dehra. He remembers going, into the jungle, planting flowering shrubs between the sal and sheesham trees. (300) His father had said,

...people keep cutting trees, instead of planting them, there'll soon be no forests left at all, and the world will be just one vast desert.

Bond spends entire day with his father planting trees on stony Island, his father suggests him:

...that the trees used to move and they will move again. See how they reach out with their arms. (300)

After many years when he tries to locate the island, and he saw many koels and parrots live there and a number of other shrubs, grasses and plants have grown up under the trees he and his father had planted. The author feels that the trees "know" him, and they "whisper", and "beckon" him near to them. He says, "They have multiplied. They are moving. In this small forgotten corner of the world, my father's dreams are coming true, and the trees are moving again."(301)

Bond and his father want to preserve both flora and fauna in Dehra. Planting trees are moral duty of man to nurture this love of trees and impart it to their children. This is going beyond one's own garden, and beautifying the world at large, and creating shelter for birds, butterflies and animals, is the largesse that Bond gives out to the world.

In *Death of the Trees* the dreadful picture of deforestation in name of development. The story betrays a cruel beheads of mountain trees, and shows that lack of ecological propriety reinforces pollution and dreadful consequences. The lives of trees have been cut short for human convenient vivifies another anthropocentric way of promise bereft of any ethical thoughtfulness. Bond exposes how natural demise directly affects the animal world, which is callously overlooked by *Public Works Department (PWD)*:

The explosions that continually shatter the silence of the mountains as thousand-year-old rocks are dynamited have frightened away all but the most intrepid of birds and animals. Even the bold langoors haven't shown their faces for over a fortnight. (461)

Yet, the Bond is optimist about the fate of the trees. He hopes for best that in the nearby mountain, where they have not yet been agitated by malign hands, they grow peacefully. By accusing his



optimism immediately as being a ,negative attitude'(461), he in turn pays a serious attention from his reader.

In Bond's writing, physical world exists with natural. He speaks volumes once again when he compares his brother's death by a road accident to the demise of trees by PWD. He postulates that both his brother and the tree are ,victims of the roads; the tree is killed by PWD, my brother by a truck' (460). By making this comparison between his brother and the tree Bond not merely ascribes human spirit to the latter but also put them on the same moral ground for reappraisal. The assassination of the trees appears to the author so vicious that he could hardly endure the sight. He decides to keep his window close. The disastrous act by PWD, to his dismay, multiplies dust and deserts mountain greenery. Such consciousness-raising issues, as noted in Ruskin Bond's stories, permeate through literature, ethics, biology, lifestyle, and so on, thereby propelling the entire academia to participate actively. Bond's true concern for ecological harmony calls forth our social advancement in a systematic way. Estok endeavoured to treat ecocriticism as a theory and stressed that the scope of it gets broadened because of its ability to incorporate a variety of theories, such as feminist, Marxist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic and historicist.

The Leopard is a story of the night watchman cruel hunting and a leopard. Bond's depicts how lack of greenery causes of destructions on both human and non-human living. Leopards do not harm man. Yet, man kills them for earning money. He adds that the leopard does not harm the protagonist because he has no greed. Bond's observe with grief of the leopard hunted down by poachers while he walked in a silent forest: It was very silent, almost as the birds and animals knew their trust had been violated (263)

The slowly but gradually built bond with nature is overwhelmed by a wink, as the leopard becomes a prey to the hunters. The brutal attitude makes the narrator feel sorry; he asks:

But did the leopard, trusting one man, make the mistake of bestowing his trust on others? (263).

Forest world was habituated with the innocuous presence of the narrator. Bond keep harmonious relationship with all the animals, birds, trees, and the other natural elements. Even the cruel leopard befriends him taciturnly. They have confronted a few times and parted away with mutual sympathy. Bond writes his genuine concern for the animal:

The Leopard, like other members of the cat family, is nearing extinction in India, and I was surprised to find one so close to Mussoorie. (259)

Certainly the deforestation that had been taking place in and around the hills had driven the deer into this green valley; and the leopard, naturally, had followed. (259) The ill-treatment leads to a sinless animal (the leopard), as underlined by Bond, not merely shakes the narrator's ethical value but also asks the entire university for active consideration. The story shows serious concern for natural world.

CONCLUSION

Ruskin Bond is a lover of nature, nature is one of the dominant themes in his work. Bond through these stories, asks our participation not only to find out how human and non-human interdependence acts, but also to find out that protecting ecology is essential from an ethical perspective for better future. Bond's significant gesture to play the role of an eco-critic is clearly visible through the reading of these stories.

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