



The Healing Power of the Himalayan Landscape in the Fiction of Ruskin Bond

Sujendrakumari J

Guest Faculty, Dept, of English
Govt first grade college, Mulbagal.
Bangalore North University
Mail id: Sujijram89@gmail.com

Abstract

Ruskin Bond's literary corpus is profoundly intertwined with the majestic landscape of the Indian Himalayas. Known as the "resident Wordsworth" of India, Bond is often hailed as depicting nature not just as a backdrop but as an animate, sentient entity that can offer immense psychological and spiritual renewal. This paper examines the therapeutic aspects of nature in Bond's fiction, the mountains, the rains and trees in the Himalayas as sanctuaries for his characters. The analysis reveals that in Bond's work, the protagonists experience a healing process from grief, alienation and the suffocating nature of contemporary society through the peaceful and eternal embrace of nature, viewed through an ecocritical perspective.

1. Introduction

An integral part of Ruskin Bond's writing is the connection between man and his world. Bond's life was spent in the hill stations of Dehradun, Mussoorie and Shimla, making the foothills of the Himalayas his home. The mountains, rivers, forests, and wildlife are always present in his narratives, influencing the atmosphere and themes created in his writing. Bond's nature is a living part of human life. His picturesque backgrounds are always "filled with a deep-rooted faith in the healing power of nature". As the world becomes materialistic, urbanised and polluted, Bond's depiction of the Himalayas provides a place of retreat. He is the author of texts that emphasize the emotional and spiritual benefits of the natural environment, as well as its physical nourishment, which serve to counter the alienation of modern life.

2. Solitude and healing grief

Bond's childhood was lonely, alienated, and had a short, premature end to his father's life. Instead, he did not give in to despair, but instead sought relief from the "innocent beauty of the hills, rains, and the people. The natural world shows itself to be an "immense healing force that dissipated the overpowering sense of solitariness" in his fiction. Nature delivers therapy, alleviates the complaints of the young, fragile protagonists.



This is poignantly illustrated in the semi-autobiographical short story "Coming Home to Dehra. After his father's death, the young protagonist feels the loss of his father and is seeking closure. The boy finds comfort in an emotionally distant mother by looking out of a big window at a neglected garden with litchi trees and marigolds. In this way, nature acts as a kind of silent, kind guardian to shield the child from needless pain, to allow him to experience his loss in his own time, without the judgmental pressure or criticism of adults.

3. Escape and Mental Health

The first novel Bond had written, *The Room on the Roof*, is about psychological restoration. Protagonist Rusty, a sixteen year old Anglo Indian boy feels trapped and suffocated in the European style house of his guardian Mr. Harrison. The high walls and shut windows of the house represent the psychological and physical restrictions that make him feel like he can't be free and in harmony with nature.

Rusty's eventual trip into the bazaar, forest and hills initiates his journey of self-discovery. The results of this study show how mental health improves through direct exposure to nature. The findings of this study highlight the positive effect of experiencing nature directly on improvements to mental health. The natural surroundings reflect Rusty's own psychic state: he feels "crazy" at the sight of rain, and is reborn at the start of the Holi festival. Moreover, "the rain cleanses him of the conception of the harsh tutelage of Mr Harrison". In the sequel, *Vagrants in the Valley*, the soothing influence of nature is brought to life through plants. As they struggle with growing up, Rusty and his pal Kishen are always comforted by the presence and security of trees, which serve as their "parents. As they grow into teens in and out of trouble, there is always the "parental presence" and security of trees. Rusty then thinks of a guardian's voice in the leaves, the warmth and chillness of the branches and the protective "shade of a mother" under them.

4. The Spiritual Dimensions of the Mountains and Rain

Aside from the comfort of the mind, Bond's Himalayas provide a great spiritual renewal. The mountains tower high and stand for endurance, eternity and a world beyond the fleeting concerns of human life. Bond's characters use the mountains as a place to escape the hustle and bustle of modernity and to find the "truths of life".

This spiritual elevation is specifically mentioned in the novel *Delhi is Not Far* where the narrator, convinced that his friend Suraj, who experiences attacks of epilepsy, is going to be



healed by “Mother Nature” in the hills. The narrator claims that being close to nature cleanses our soul and mind and elevates us morally and emotionally to a spiritual level.

Likewise, *Rain in the Mountains* portrays the monsoon season as a period of great change and purification. The rain not only nourishes the flora and fauna, it is a metaphor for spiritual renewal. Rain cleanses not only the earth, but also the soul, as Bond says, "Rain washes the dirt from the ground, but also from our souls, refreshing our spirits and renewing our bond with nature. The rain teaches us to be strong, humble, and to seek beauty in transience.

6. The Nature of Flora (Feeding & Fighting)

In Bond's literary world, trees and plants are not just objects but living beings that provide a strong emotional connection. The *Tree Lover* follows Sarah, a woman who is feeling despair and disheartened by the pace of deforestation and the frenetic pace of the city, until she finds solace and inspiration in the arms of trees. She finds out about the "calming impact trees have on her mental and emotional health". She feels comforted, at peace and finding a new direction in her life when she's by a tree, as if the answers are in the branches.

In *The Prospect of Flowers*, the old Miss Mackenzie lives alone but derives great pleasure and companionship from her little-known expertise in botany. Her death is not presented as a tragedy, but as a final, natural, and harmonious fusion with the wild, back to the mountains where the blue gentian and purple columbine grew. For Bond, gardening is a sacred activity; in *The Cherry Tree* Rakesh, a young boy, touches the tree he has lovingly placed and asks, "Is it to be my god?"; here the relationship of nurturing nature and the human spirit is tied to the divine.

7. Nature as the ultimate refuge

The healing power of nature offers a remedy to human suffering and the alienating forces of the urbanization in Ruskin Bond's literature. His portrayal of the Indian Himalayas is a testament to his firm conviction that nature is not merely a resource for exploitation and conquest, but a place of refuge, healing, and moral clarity.

In every Bond work, the natural world is the healing element, whether it is in the form of a banyan tree which becomes the surrogate mother of a lonely boy or the all-enveloping rain that clears away the emotional load of the adult world. In leaving his readers, he imparts to them the deep knowledge that human life is full of pain, complexities, and transient moments, but the mountains are always there to restore the human spirit and mind. Deep Ecology is the only



lens that gives the reader a full vision of the healing power of the landscape in the fiction of Ruskin Bond. Deep Ecology is a theory developed by philosophers such as Arne Naess and George Sessions that the quality of life and the flourishing of human and non-human life on the planet are of intrinsic value, apart from their usefulness for human purposes. Bond's literature naturally fits into this biocentric equality which challenges the anthropocentric hierarchy with human domination of the earth. Bond's anthology *The Book of Nature* is a close study of the micro-ecosystems of the Himalayas, highlighting the fact that even the smallest of the organisms have a right to be, and have something to contribute towards the ecological balance.

Bond's profound ecological perspective can be seen in his contemplations on a blade of grass or a small insect. The smallest insect on earth, the 'fairy fly' measures just a fifth of a millimetre, and he is amazed at the way it is constructed – 'absolute perfection'. "Grass has a fundamental value because it's home to crickets and ladybirds, Bond muses in the quote from Walt Whitman, "so that it would be no fun to live on a planet on which grass does not grow." Raising insects and weeds to a level of extreme significance, Bond reminds us that psychological and spiritual healing can only be found by recognizing one's role within this complex system of life, not above it. His therapeutic vision is the realization that life and emotional tranquility are completely contingent upon the maintenance of all the ecological substances.

8. Rivers and Pools – Water as a Source of Discovery and Continuity

In Bond's fiction, water features play a symbolic role that represents the unstoppable passage of time, discovery, and emotional continuity, while trees and mountains provide shelter and stability. *How Far is the River* is a short story by Bond that explores the psychology of a twelve year old boy who has an uncontrollable impulse to simply traverse seven miles to touch the river and, in some way, "know it personally. The boy's expedition down the rugged, dusty and snowy trails symbolizes the human tendency to seek out the source of life. Upon finally hearing the roaring noise of the water, and being ankle-deep in the cold blue river, his tremendous joy reinforces the direct connection that we have with nature that is pure and undisturbed, and that is where the rest of the human spirit is met.

Likewise, in *The Meeting Pool*, nature serves as the silent observer of childhood connections and the transience of time. A small waterfall flows into the ground over smooth, grey and yellow rocks creating a hidden pool that Rusty finds. After ten years, this pool will become a haven and Rusty and his friends promise to come back. Ten years later, Rusty comes back



alone and realizes his friends aren't there, but when he sees yet another pool where children are playing, his heart is filled with joy. The poignant moment teaches the message that human relationships can be lost or altered, but nature's cycle of renewal remains, bringing solace and continuity to those willing to see it.

9. From Innocence to Experience

Bond's use of the natural environment is often used as an ecological metaphor to illustrate the psychological growth and maturation of his characters from innocence to experience. The anthology *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* is an excellent reflection of this transition shaping a natural and non utilitarian relation with the environment, where children's innate nature naturally leads them. The protagonist's childhood in Dehradun is full of unusual animals like a Great Indian Hornbill, monkeys and a python. The young boy grows up with a deep respect for biodiversity from his grandfather's conviction that humans "must acknowledge their rights".

As children become adults, however, the bonds between them and nature are often complicated by limits imposed by society and "songs of experience". Bond shows the tragedy of this loss of innocence in the characters who see trees only as fodder or barriers to modern development. In the introduction to the anthology, set in Maplewood Cottage, Bond reveals his distress at the modernisation of forests, and his desire to be in "innocent ignorance" rather than an adult, who has been "heartbroken" to see them being lost. The healing power of nature, therefore, is most available to people who don't lose their sense of wonder and refuse to treat the earth simply as a resource to be exploited. Bond extols the healing qualities of the Himalayas and at the same time acts as an environmental activist, alerting readers to the devastating psychological and physical effects of disturbing this sacred place. The widespread deforestation, limestone quarrying and urbanisation threatening the area is not only shown as an ecological catastrophe but as an attack on the human spirit.

In the strong narrative *Dust on the Mountains*, Bond attacks the system of destruction of the hills. Bisnu, a young boy, is witness to the extreme destruction brought about by limestone quarries. The story is depicted graphically as the top of the mountain is "blasted away by dynamite" and leaves behind a bare wasteland with no grass, flowers, butterflies, or birds. The "skeletons of a few trees" serve as a stark reminder and the air and water are highly polluted due to industrial greed, displacing wildlife and human residents.



In *Death of the Trees*, Bond speaks of the personal nature of his loss over the Public Works Departments reckless logging of magnificent oaks, deodars and maples for road widening. He draws parallels between the devastation of a tree and the death of his own young brother in an accident with a car, emphasizing the deep emotional impact of ecological harm. The loss of sanctuary is further highlighted by the plight of wildlife. *No Room for a Leopard* tells the story of one of the most tragic killings of a trusting leopard at the hands of poachers who were in search of the valuable skins for the trade. Animals lose their habitats due to deforestation, putting them at risk of being killed by people. When the leopard is killed, Bond notes the "chilling silence that falls over the forest" as if the "soul of the jungle has been violated by human betrayal. In *Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright*, he states that "the tiger is the very soul of India, and when the last tiger goes, so will the spirit of the nation; when wildlife disappears, the nation's soul is diminished.

10. Nature's Fury and Human Resilience

Bond does not oversimplify nature; he is not oblivious to its powerful and destructive power. But, argues he, "when we face the might of nature, we become survivors – we become resilient and resilience is a kind of healing and psychological fortification." In his unpredictable nature, God warns us that we are weak and insignificant. A short story set in the hectic town of Shillong vividly depicts this scenario: *Earthquake*. The Burman family's daily lives are thrown into complete chaos when the earth swells and collapses, smashing the Burmans' grandest hotel and crowded bazaars. Bond draws attention to the animals' better sense of the environment because they know the disaster is coming before humans do, with dogs, cats and birds having an "ecological sense" that allows them to anticipate the disaster. The characters learn humility as they survive in the chaos of the earthquake. The Burman family, however, chooses to build the new house from "small rocks" in order to "sway and rock" with the future shaking of the earth and not to fight it. It's an adaptation that reflects a fusion between the human and the natural world, that mends the wounds of nature's caprices by accepting them instead of resisting them.

In Bond's tales, nature is often a savior, even when it is raging. After the truck has been overloaded, the driver of the truck falls down a steep gorge in *Dust on the Mountains*, but is saved from death by a strong tree that stops the truck. It was the tree that saved me," the driver found, embodying the belief that every force of nature gives grace even in the face of the relentless abuse of man. In *Sita and the River*, a little girl is swept up by a great flood of the Ganges. She hangs on to the branches of a tall peepal tree which is knocked over, but carries



her along downstream. The theme is that the river can be "bad," but it is also "good," and this "goodness" is all-important for survival; to survive, one must give up the idea of controlling the river.

Bond's relationship with the environment and humanity in the context of therapy and protection can also be explored from an ecofeminist perspective. The androcentric worldview is the basis for the oppression of women and the capitalist exploitation of nature, according to ecofeminist theory. These stories by Bond challenge such a mindset by often portraying women, children, and outsiders as the real stewards of balance and ecological harmony, with a natural knowledge that disturbs commercial rapacity.

Bond's setting in the Garhwal Himalayas is a setting to which the Chipko movement resonates, in which rural women physically embraced trees in order to prevent them from being chopped down by lumberjacks. Women are frequently the symbols of this attitude towards nature in Bond's work. The young girl Binya's world is one that is non-materialistic, existing in harmony with the hills and the forests, in a moral world that contrasts with the male shopkeeper's materialistic view of life and his greed. The story is about an old woman named Miss Mackenzie, whose only responsibility is to be the last surviving custodian of the rare knowledge of plants in the Himalayas, *The Prospect of Flowers*. Her knowledge of the plants of the area is a natural heritage which much of modern, patriarchal society has neglected or forgotten. Her tranquil death is presented as the ultimate, the sacred union with the wild, back to the mountains where the "blue gentian and purple columbine grew". Those who are at the fringes of society can discover their strength, dignity and healing in the arms of nature, Bond says.

11. The 'Civilized Wilderness' and the Ache of Nostalgia

One of the recurring themes in Bond's work is the contrast between the rhythm and peace of country life and the tumultuous forces of urbanization. Bond sets out exploring the idea of the "civilized wilderness" — a way of life in which man's life and relationships are in harmony with nature — and laments its swift demise. He fiercely condemns the dissonant stride of material progress that desensitizes human sensibility and breaks the strong bond between man and earth.

In his essay *The Civilized Wilderness*, Bond is bitter about what he calls the "green spaces" that have been lost due to urban expansion, including the large "jheel" (lake) on Najafgarh



Road, which was once a fishing haven. He observes how the city is a "concrete jungle" where a man can no longer hear the nightjars, feel the foxes dancing in the moonlight or smell a leopard in Landour's forests, where he finds a "silent life. He contrasts the "concrete jungle" of the city with the "silent life" of the forests in Landour, where a man can smell a leopard, see foxes dancing in the moonlight and hear the nightjars without fear. True freedom, psychological healing, is found only in the independence of wildness and not in the man-made realm of urban society, Bond says.

This hint of yesteryear's simpler, more eco-friendly lifestyle is also reflected in *The Last Tonga Ride*, where the author takes a look at why it was simpler, more organic, in the past. Finally, the tonga driver is in harmony with nature, for he does not destroy even the earthworms, while the motor cars are indifferent. The story is a cry for the days of the past when man lived in harmony with nature, and that technology often negatively impacts the natural world and the human spirit.

12. Conclusion

The rich body of Ruskin Bond's writing is a magnificent ecocritical document of the healing power of the Himalayan landscape. His gentle and evocative narrative is a potent mode of environmental advocacy, although he may not have the militant tone of a traditional environmentalist. Bond breaks the false dichotomy between humans and nature by demonstrating that our mental health, spiritual development and physical life all depend on the health of the natural world.

Bond's careful record of the plants and animals of the Himalayas fosters a biocentric attitude, one that calls for appreciation of living things, great and small. His stories are a twofold expression: they extol the beauty, simplicity, and healing power of the mountains, and they call out to action the threat of irreversible damage due to deforestation, uncontrolled urbanization, and commercial greed.

Whether it is Rusty escaping into the mountain air, Rakesh catching glimpses of the divine in a cherry tree or Sita riding out the flood by clinging to a peepal tree, Bond's characters illustrate that a life lived in harmony with nature is the highest and most fulfilling. He teaches his readers that making progress is not about conquering the earth, but it is about living within the earth sustainably and symbiotically.



Bond's writings are an important way to reconnect with spiritual and psychological health in a world that is becoming more and more focused on climate change and ecological disorientation. He reminds us that this is not our world, but our garden, a fragile one. Repeatedly urging to take upon themselves with modesty, "Men come and go, the mountains remain", Ruskin Bond reminds the man who has to take on his role. Repeatedly he was asking the human race to accept its duty in a modest manner and to make sure that the healing power of nature is not lost.

References

1. Awasthi, Kuldip. "Ecofeminism and Environment in the Work of Ruskin Bond." *European Academic Research*, Vol. III, Issue 1, 2015.
2. Beniwal, Rajesh. "The Human and the Natural World Co-relation in the Special Reference to Ruskin Bond." *Universal Research Reports*, Vol. 04, Issue 04, 2017.
3. Bhowmik, Chandana, and Dipendu Das. "Concern for Ecology in Ruskin Bond's The Book of Nature: An Ecocritical Study." *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, Vol. 4, Issue V, 2015.
4. Goel, Mona. "An ecocritical study of Ruskin Bond's select stories." *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2018.
5. Govindappa. "Eco-Criticism in the Short Stories of Ruskin Bond: A Critical Study." *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research*, Vol. 3, Issue 6, 2020.
6. Hanumantha. "Ruskin Bond's Portrayal of Nature and Simplicity in the Indian Himalayas." *Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol. 13, Issue 08, 2018.
7. Jain, Rashmi. "Green Studies/ Ecocriticism in Indian English Fiction." *The Creative Launcher*, Vol. II, Issue IV, 2017.
8. Kashyap, Meenu. "An Ecological Study of Ruskin Bond's Earthquake." *Ignited*, 2016.
9. Kumari, Shilpa, and Atal Kumar. "Navigating the Path from Innocence to Experience: An Ecocritical Reading of Ruskin Bond's Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra." *Rajasthali Journal*, 2023.



-
10. Nagur, Chitrashekhar S. "A Study on Theme of Nature in the Stories of Ruskin Bond." *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 2022.
 11. Ravindranath, C. V. S., and Y. Somalatha. "Eco-consciousness in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories." *International Journal of Academic Research*, Vol. 6, Issue 12, 2019.
 12. Singh, Dharmendra. "Revisiting Healing Mother Nature in Ruskin Bond's The Room on the Roof, Rain in the Mountain and Tales of the Tree Lover." *JETIR*, 2018.