

# PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH LITERATURE: A STUDY OF THE SELECT WORKS OF RUSKIN BOND

Shameem Qadar

Research Scholar, Janardhan Rai Nagar Rajasthan Vidyapeeth University, Udaipur

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## ABSTRACT

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With the alarming rate in the increase in population, there has been an accelerating pace for the need for more resources. As a result, industrial activities are growing rapidly to meet the increasing demands for these resources. In the past few years, we have been witnessing weather changes, global warming and environmental degradation at the extreme level and hence environmental sustainability has become increasingly important. Society is suffering greatly due to the resulting environmental degradation such as water, air and land pollution. The thoughtless and reckless attitude of human beings towards nature has adversely affected ecosystems to the extent where they are unable to recover from natural disasters like flooding, global warming and extreme weather conditions. These negative consequences on our environment have drawn a lot of attention of writers on a global scale and thereby literature has played a vital role in promoting environmental sustainability. Over the years, several writings have been done on environmental sustainability. In simpler terms, the meaning of the term 'sustainability' in relation to environment is to preserve and make judicious and optimum use of resources so as to avoid depletion and save it for future generation. The two fundamental issues are covered in it- 1) Economic growth leading to environmental degradation and 2) the need for such growth to lessen the burden of poverty from society. To achieve sustainable development, a reasonable balance needs to be maintained between the environment, economy and man. The modern environmentalist movement, that emerged in the late 19th century, commonly known as "Eco-criticism" gave rise to a rich array of fictional and non-fictional writings concerning with the relationship between the man and nature. The selected works of the contemporary writer Ruskin Bond deserves special mention in this regard, whose writings are replete with a plea to preserve nature, bring awareness and create consciousness in people towards nature. His writings have eco-consciousness issues that it inspires not only readers but propel the entire academia to participate and work towards promoting environmental sustainability and sustainable growth.

**Keywords:** Weather Changes, Global Warming, Environmental Degradation, Eco-criticism, Sustainability.

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## INTRODUCTION

'Modern management theory is constructed by a fractured epistemology, which separates humanity from nature... Reintegration is necessary if organizational science is to support ecologically and socially sustainable development.' (Gladwin et al. 1995; 874)

The quote's main message is that academics of management study organization as if nature is nonexistent, and as if humanity were not immersed in nature. Author hence tends to argue about the fact that people are part of the earth and not separate from it. If an organization is also engaged in transaction with the environment that use the environment's resources and services, then that organization is decreasing the

availability of those resources for all the other constituent parts of the earth.

The ecological health of the planet is essential for human well being, and that the earth's ecological health is being compromised with organization and how they operate being part of the process that is creating its ecological problems. Human beings have put these socially constructed and malleable truths regarding the economy and the pursuit of profit before the less malleable physical laws of the environment: metaphorically, we have put the cart before the horse. To move towards a situation where organization operate in a more environmentally benign manner, and when the rules of the economy recognize ecological limits has been the subject of wide array of literature.

Gladwin in 1995 has offered a paradigm called eco centrism which assumes that the earth is alive and is the key to the web of life; that nature has inherent value; and that human beings are an intrinsic part of nature. This paradigm also assumes that the planet's limits are already being exceeded; that the environmental problems are potentially catastrophic; and that humanity needs to work with nature to restore a balance. This paradigm favors ecological integrity as the primary means of performance. It also believes that humanity should not be materialistic and should recognize its place as just another member of the animal kingdom; that growth should be eliminated and that the future should never be discounted.

To define environmental sustainability we must first define sustainability. Sustainability is the ability to continue a defined behavior indefinitely. Environmental sustainability is the rates of renewable resource harvest, pollution creation, and non renewable resource definition that can be continued indefinitely. If they cannot be continued indefinitely then they are not sustainable. Basically the world's standard definition of environmental sustainability is sustainable development, which means sustainable economic growth, which is an oxymoron. No form of economic growth can be continued indefinitely. Furthermore, all economic growth today is terribly environmentally degrading.

This paper focuses on the selected short stories of Ruskin Bond, and illuminates the writer's concern for environmental problems which are created by human beings in the name of urbanization and development. His fiction exposes the destruction caused by the materialistic world to nature and to the self. The study of Bond's stories inculcates the very idea to preserve nature's originality among the readers and promote environmental sustainability. The concept of nature has always been the epicenter of man's culture and religion since the ancient times which is quite vividly visible in Vedic and Greek mythologies. Since earlier times, the themes related to the environmental protection and environmental sustainability was prevalent in the fictional and non fictional writings of the writers since earlier times.

In these contemporary times, there are also such writers who take 'nature' as a part of their texts through different genres. Whether it is fiction, poetry or drama,

literature always provides the message to the human beings. But in this fast paced life in which a man is more inclined towards technological and advanced world, a short story is considered as a good genre to spread messages. Ruskin Bond, a prominent and contemporary Indian writer of British origin who has been portraying life and experiences merged with environmental concern in his stories. His creative works are the celebration of the environment in which he lives, especially hills and mountains. The association with the natural environment imbibes nature's attributes like innocence, simplicity and purity. Unlike his well known contemporaries who are especially concerned with social political turmoil, he takes up the issue of ecology and environment through his stories in the most conspicuous manner. The kind of natural world that Bond creates in his stories comprise all the living organisms of the earth and this is non anthropocentric. He not only gives didactic lesson to his readers but reinforce them towards promoting environmental sustainability.

The stories of Ruskin Bond are filled with the concerns of critiquing the hegemonic relationship of the patriarchal and capitalist society with that of the mountains, flora and fauna of the Himalayas. These have been depicted with a sense of sentimental consciousness. In the story, Good Day to you, Uncle, a presentation is made by Bond of those forest areas which are on the verge of extinction due to the reckless activities of man. Human being tends to dominate and colonize all those forest areas from where he can fetch all the precious things from natural resources. In this act of oppression and domination they are not conscious of the value and importance nature holds for us. Bond recounts the plights of those inhabitants of forests who are homeless because of man's exercising control over the resources available on the earth. Humans are selfish to the extent that they wish to acquire all the wealth of nature with their full energy. Human beings has suppressed the powerless state of nature, just like the males in the patriarchal structure, shows its tyranny over the weaker sections like women.

In the other story, Where Have all the Trees Gone, we witness the deeds of Public Works Department who are destroying nature for the sake of urbanization and development. The author states that, "the tree killed by PWD", my brother by a truck" (Bond 2008). He is

associated with the trees emotionally and considers them like his brother. Bond feels sympathy for the powerless state of nature, which are silent, weak and helpless against the authoritative figure of man. Bond expresses sadness for those birds whose shelter is destroyed as those organization cut the trees frequently for building roads, dams etc in the name of development. Now these birds are rendered homeless in the realm of concrete walls and buildings. His words, "Forest birds, all of them, they will now be in search of some other stretch of surviving forest." (Bond 2008). This very phrase 'stretch of surviving forest' depicts the helpless condition of forests being destroyed and their survival depends entirely on the mercy of man.

In his another story, *Dust on the Mountains*, Bond talks about the problem created by human beings in the hilly areas for meeting selfish ends. Bond shows the problem of powerful persons or organization who undertakes such oppression and exploitation of trees. In this story, organization undertake excessive destruction of Himalayan trees and the villagers are sitting and observing sadly the helpless trees perishing in the flames. The protagonist of the story Bishnu feels upset seeing the plight of the earth. He considers earth as mother. Ruskin Bond presents the scenario of wood logger who belonging to rich background. When Bishnu is travelling in a bus going to the city, the old man in the bus states that, "there were trees here once. But the contractors took the deodars for furniture and houses. And the pines were taped to death for resin" (Bond 2008).

Yet in another story, *Flames in the Forest*, the main character Romi is caught up in a situation when he finds himself surrounded by fire in the forest. He is utterly shocked to see the helpless state of birds and animals whose dwelling place is destroyed. The precious flora and fauna are destroyed by the huge fire in the forest. Romi states that, "not only pheasants but smaller birds too were screaming across the road- parrots, jungle crows, owls, magpie- and the air was filled with their cries" (Bond 2008). This destruction and exploitation is the result of man's indifference towards nature. All such hazards occur because man is not concerned towards the well being of the landscape. It is thus concluded that it is entirely on the will of man as to whether they want to take care of the forest which would give them development benefits or they can simply ignore

whatever wrong or right is happening in the forest. This is unfair on the part of human beings to exercise control and dominate other living or non living entities of this planet. Man, if cannot do good to nature, they must not at least obstruct their own ways of survival. They must know the fact that it is humans who are dependent upon nature for the fulfillment of their needs on other natural resources. Nature on the other hand is self sufficient.

Ruskin Bond has successfully captured the deeds of those human beings who are trying to exercise the authority over living and non living entities of the earth with no concern for their autonomous functioning. Bond narrates in the story *Good Day to you, Uncle* that, "There was a time when the forests on the banks of Ganga had provided food and shelter for some thirty or forty tigers but man in search of trophies had shot them all, and now there remained only one old tiger in the jungle." (Bond 2008)

There is a term called 'anthropocentrism' which is a conception considering humans at the center of all the activity and time. It is a reality that human beings consider him as so powerful that anything can be tamed by him. Ramu, in the story. *Good Day to you, Uncle*, tells his friend, "Perhaps we are a little killer in some ways. To be able to laugh and to be merciful are the only things that make man better than the beast." (Bond 2008)

These type of ideas also make the belief stronger that human beings can conquer everything. In his stories, Bond expresses his happiness to remain with and enjoy the company of insects which survive for a short period of time. This inculcates a value within all to realize the importance of each and every being on this earth. Everyone has the right to live peacefully and with all the pleasures on this earth and not just man. Man thus must not prove to be a hindrance in the autonomous functioning of organisms. In the story, *Good Day to you, Uncle*, Ramu's father states that, "A man needs the land as much as a tiger needs the jungle." (Bond 2008). All have the right to live peacefully in their concerned places. In this story Bond mentions that owing to the selfish interest of the humans, there has been a decrease in the number of tigers. Earlier there were 30/40 tigers but the hunters have decreased this number in order to fulfill their selfish ends. Hunters and visitors are even searching for the last one tiger which has escaped.

As a writer, Ruskin Bond is said to advocate the path of activism. Since his childhood he lives in the lap of Himalayas and natural surroundings. Such a great and considerable time spent in the realm of nature has made him sensitive and concerned for the voiceless and non human world and has thus developed an understanding for the issue of ecology. He possess the knowledge of plants, animals, landscape of the valleys and non human entities of his concerned place which also signifies his legitimacy of being environmental advocate.

These non human entities which are voiceless and suffer exploitation and oppression at the hands of humans receive sympathy of Bond. He advocates these entities and this advocacy will help to that larger natural process in which the entire eco system and the living and non living entities of natural world depend upon each other.

Through his writings Bond suggest those positive ways with which man can develop sustainable and intimate interaction with natural world and such kind of bond will develop and sustain between them which will liberate man from ulterior motives and nature in return, as it always has been, will provide, nurture and culture in abundance. Bond considers the right of graceful living of non human entities as human beings. He suggests through these stories the ways of coexistence with natural world. Non human entities help to maintain the chain of existence. He doesn't want to propagate but only stresses the fact that non human entities are significant and hold an important place.

Through his fiction Bond creates a sense of relationship of readers with the entities of natural world. "Bond does not believe in environmental propaganda because one has to develop genuine concern keeping in mind the requirements of life in the mountains" (Aggarwal 2010)

Bond wishes man to interact with nature so that he can realize his inner self and get connected with it and this would enable him gain intrinsic happiness. He is concerned about environmental problems which occur due to the building of hotels at an increasing pace due to

the acceleration in flourishing of tourism industry. Bond focuses on the need to check the thoughtless practices of contractors and builders who are involved with mining and development. Bond has a major concern for the natural surroundings and his stories are filled with a plea to conserve nature. Bond notices another fact about increasing number of pilgrims in the hilly areas who travel with materialistic approach and not with spirituality.

As the forest and hilly places are being intruded more and more by the tourists, the exploitation is on a large scale. On one hand, Bond holds a positive outlook because such interactions might lead to the development of a specific kind of connection between human and non human world and this leads to the development of consciousness.

According to Amita Aggarwal, "Bond does not preach his conviction directly because he knows that everyone is governed by his own presumption. He simply sets the contrasts of perspectives and involves the reader to make his choice." (Aggarwal 2010)

Through the fiction writings of Bond one can infer that the objective is not to provide the readers with romantic idea of nature or hilly sceneries but a powerful and strong meaning is hidden in the writings. He seems to advocate the various non human entities which are voiceless and are subjected to oppression and self beneficiary interests by man. Such stories are written with the objective of enriching the minds and hearts of the readers with such values which will lead them to contribute in conserving the nature and acknowledge its dignity and worth which has been at times overloaded and ignored.

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