

The Dynamic Interactions between Humans and Nature: An Eco-Critical Discourse in Works of Ruskin Bond

Dr. Bhavya P M

Asst. Prof. Dept. of English, Nehru Memorial College Sullia, D.K, Karnataka

Abstract

This paper investigates the evolving and interconnected relationships between humans and the natural environment in Indian English literature, with a particular focus on the eco-critical dimensions of Ruskin Bond's regional fiction. Situated at the intersection of postcolonial eco-criticism and biocentric philosophy, Bond's writing challenges anthropocentric perspectives that regard the environment solely as a resource or static backdrop. Through analysis of key texts such as *An Island of Trees*, *No Room for a Leopard*, *Angry River*, and *The Blue Umbrella*, this study demonstrates how Bond portrays nature as an active, dynamic force that shapes human identity, cultural memory, and ethical responsibility. Amid rapid modernization and unchecked infrastructure development in the Himalayan foothills, Bond foregrounds everyday interactions with plants and animals, articulating a localized environmental ethic. The paper contends that his literature cultivates ecological awareness, employing accessible narratives to promote environmental stewardship and interspecies equity.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Biocentric, Socionatural hybridity, Anthropocene.

Introduction

Eco-criticism has emerged as a crucial framework within the humanities, responding directly to global ecological crises that science and technology alone cannot solve (M. Nathiya & Rema, 2024). Ecocriticism, defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, traces how textual narratives reflect, interpret, and shape cultural attitudes toward the earth (Kumar, 2025; Anjan, 2018). While early Western ecocriticism often prioritized wilderness preservation and romanticized landscapes, the discourse in developing regions—particularly postcolonial India—takes on a distinct character. Here, ecological concerns are intertwined with economic survival, rural displacement, urban expansion, and the long-term effects of colonial extraction.

Indian literature has historically emphasized profound connections with the natural world. From the Vedic personification of natural elements to Rabindranath Tagore's eco-philosophy and Raja Rao's mythic landscapes, successive generations of writers have examined the intricate relationships linking human societies to their ecosystems. However, contemporary industrialization and capital-driven urbanization have disrupted these longstanding connections. The environment now faces persistent exploitation, as forests are cleared for urban development and ecological systems are increasingly threatened by pollution (Atkulwar, 2023).

Within this evolving literary landscape, Ruskin Bond stands as a vital figure. Writing primarily from his home in Mussoorie amidst the Garhwal Himalayas, Bond offers a unique, localized perspective on the human-nature relationship (Anjan, 2018; Atkulwar, 2023). While some of his contemporaries address environmental issues through overt political polemics, Bond's ecological vision grows quietly from the ordinary rhythms of rural and small-town life (Kumar, 2025). His work resists human alienation from ecological settings, framing nature as a living, breathing entity that fundamentally shapes human identity, memory, and survival (Kumar, 2025).

This research article examines the dynamic interactions between humans and nature in Bond's prose. Through close readings of his principal short stories and novellas, it investigates the narrative shift from anthropocentric to biocentric perspectives. Ultimately, the paper considers how Bond's localized reflections inform broader global discussions on environmental ethics and eco-critical discourse.

Theoretical Framework: From Anthropocentrism to Biocentric Coexistence

To understand the human-nature dynamics in Bond's fiction, one must engage with key eco-critical concepts that question human dominance over non-human life. Historically, speciesist bias has treated nature as a passive backdrop or an open resource meant solely for human benefit (Chakraborty, 2023). Ecocriticism works to deconstruct this hierarchy, encouraging a transition toward biocentric principles that value sustainable progress, holistic moral accountability, and the independent realities of non-human entities (Chandrasekaran, n.d.).

William Rueckert's foundational concept of literary ecology views the biosphere as a complex web where energy, matter, and thoughts interact (Chandrasekaran n.d.). Within this web, the health of the whole depends on balanced interactions among all individual parts (Chandrasekaran, n.d.). In Bond's fiction, this perspective aligns closely with a pantheistic philosophy reminiscent of William Wordsworth, recognizing a vital presence or spirit in every object of nature, including trees, plants, rivers, and rocks (Anjan, 2018; Atkulwar, 2023).

Furthermore, the theoretical lens of "socionatural hybridity" helps explain how humans are structurally entwined with the non-human world, making it impossible to reduce or separate the two without causing severe environmental harm (Chakraborty, 2023). When human societies disregard this deep connection, nature often responds with disruptive force. In Bond's narratives, environmental shifts and natural disasters do not represent random chaos; instead, they function as moments of eco-emancipation that critique human overreach and assert the independence of the natural world (Chakraborty, 2023).

Nature as an Active Agent

A defining characteristic of Ruskin Bond's literature is his treatment of the physical landscape. In his stories, nature is never a passive setting; it functions as a vital, active presence that directly shapes human emotions, choices, and values (Kumar, 2025). The Himalayan environment acts as a site of both vulnerability and resilience, where winds alter human security, rains simultaneously nurture and threaten, and rivers embody continuity (Kumar, 2025).

In his autobiographical essays and short fiction, Bond describes trees as the literal guardians of his conscience, actively overseeing his day-to-day choices (Kumar, 2025). This deep bond is evident in the table below, which traces how distinct natural elements shift from simple geographical backdrops into active, narrative participants across his major works.

Ruskin Bond's prose fundamentally reconfigures the representation of natural elements, departing from

conventional anthropocentric tropes in favor of a deeply empathetic, eco-critical perspective. Rather than depicting forests and trees as exploitable resources or static scenery, Bond reimagines them as protective mentors, ancestral connections, and active biological sanctuaries, as exemplified in *An Island of Trees* and *My Father's Trees in Dehra*. Similarly, works such as *The Wind on Haunted Hill* and *The Blue Umbrella* portray mountain winds as unpredictable, dynamic forces that challenge human resilience and reflect psychological states. Rivers, often regarded merely as channels of transport or water sources, are depicted in *Angry River* and *Where Rivers Meet* as autonomous, powerful entities capable of nurturing life and reclaiming territory from human encroachment. Furthermore, Bond reconceptualizes wild fauna—frequently marginalized in literature as threats or game—as displaced neighbors and vulnerable cohabitants. In stories like *No Room for a Leopard* and *The Tiger in the Tunnel*, these animals demand moral accountability and respect from humans who intrude upon their habitats.

This deliberate emphasis on natural elements challenges the conventional literary division between humans and nature. By portraying the non-human world with profound emotional sensitivity, Bond's narratives foster an intimate connection with local ecosystems, cultivating foundational environmental awareness through shared vulnerability and mutual respect (Mohammad, 2023; Kumar, 2025).

Bond's short fiction frequently highlights interspecies interdependence across generations, illustrating how a green environment benefits human well-being regardless of age (Rajkhowa, n.d.). In *An Island of Trees*, this dynamic unfolds through a conversation between ten-year-old Koki and her grandmother (Atkulwar, 2023; Rajkhowa, n.d.). The grandmother shares memories of Koki's great-grandfather, a former Forest Service employee whose deep affection for trees allowed him to recognize the life and sensitivity within every sapling (Atkulwar, 2023; Rajkhowa, n.d.). The story describes the great-grandfather planting saplings in riverine and desert spaces during the monsoon, showing that barren environments can be restored through focused human care (Rajkhowa, n.d.). Decades later, these trees multiply and reclaim the land, creating a natural sanctuary where other plants, grasses, birds, and animals can thrive (Anjan, 2018; Rajkhowa, n.d.). When the narrator returns to these woods, he notes that the trees seem to recognize, whisper, and beckon to him, underscoring a continuous, reciprocal relationship between the family and the forest (Anjan, 2018).

This theme of mutual care is also central to *My Father's Trees in Dehra*. Here, planting trees is framed not merely as a hobby, but as a shared moral duty to pass on to future generations (Anjan, 2018). This act goes beyond beautifying a private garden; it is a gesture of generosity that creates shelter for birds, butterflies, and small animals, fostering a broader ecological balance (Anjan, 2018). Through these narratives, Bond illustrates how a green environment supports long-term human health and emotional contentment, presenting conservation as an active, generational partnership (Rajkhowa, n.d.).

Critique of Anthropocentric Progress

While Bond celebrates ecological harmony, his work also offers a sharp critique of unchecked urbanization, infrastructure expansion, and modern industrialization (Chandrasekaran, n.d.; Anjan, 2018). As developmental projects alter the Himalayan foothills, his stories capture the violent dislocation of local ecosystems and the fragmentation of natural habitats (Anjan, 2018).

In *Death of the Trees*, Bond directly portrays the harsh realities of deforestation carried out for human convenience (Anjan, 2018). He writes with deep concern about the destruction of mountain forests, using stark imagery to show how clearing trees removes the natural protectors of the hillsides, leading to severe erosion, pollution, and systemic instability (Anjan, 2018). In stories like *Once Upon a Mountain*

Time, industrial blasting throws rocks and trees asunder, terrifying local communities and destroying endemic plant life, such as wild strawberry patches (Anjan, 2018).

This human-driven destruction is further explored in *No Room for a Leopard* and *The Tiger in the Tunnel*. In *No Room for a Leopard*, unplanned human settlements and logging rapidly reduce the jungle, stripping a local leopard of its natural cover and hunting grounds (Chakraborty, 2023). Desperate for food, the displaced animal begins approaching the village edge to survive, leading the human inhabitants to brand it a dangerous threat and hunt it down for sport (Chakraborty, 2023).

Bond uses these conflicts to critique the human tendency to view wildlife hunting as a game or a source of trophies, linking animal violence directly to human encroachment (Chakraborty, 2023). Through young characters like Ramu, who question the morality of these hunts, Bond integrates an environmental ethic into the narrative, reminding readers that humans share an indirect moral obligation to protect the freedom and habitats of non-human species (Chakraborty, 2023).

Eco-critical discourse also examines how consumerism and material greed damage human relationships with the natural environment (Chandrasekaran, n.d.). Bond's popular novella *The Blue Umbrella* explores this dynamic within a small, isolated Himalayan village (Chandrasekaran, n.d.). The plot centers on Binya, a young mountain girl who values her deep connection with the local landscape, feeling entirely at ease among dark forests and lonely hilltops, yet overwhelmed by crowded market towns (Sisodiya, 2026).

The conflict begins when Binya trades her ancestral leopard-claw pendant—a traditional symbol of a close connection to nature—to obtain a bright blue umbrella from a tourist (Sisodiya, 2026). The umbrella represents artificial beauty and material possession, and it quickly sparks intense jealousy and division among the villagers, particularly the shopkeeper Ram Bharosa (Chandrasekaran, n.d.; Sisodiya, 2026).

Throughout the story, Bond uses natural elements to mirror these changing social dynamics. The mountain wind is personified as a playful, mischievous force that dances with the umbrella, integrating the human object back into the natural order (Sisodiya, 2026). However, as greed creates conflict within the village, the landscape's peace is temporarily disrupted (Sisodiya, 2026).

Ultimately, Binya recognizes that her attachment to a material possession has caused social friction and inner unrest (Chandrasekaran, n.d.; Sisodiya, 2026). By choosing to give up the umbrella, she restores social harmony and returns to her peaceful relationship with her surroundings (Chandrasekaran, n.d.). Through this simple resolution, Bond illustrates that true environmental and emotional well-being requires moving away from possessive greed and emphasizes sustainable, cooperative living over the accumulation of material possessions (Chandrasekaran, n.d.; Sisodiya, 2026).

When human activities ignore ecological balance, nature often asserts its power through natural cycles or extreme weather events. Bond's novella *Angry River* addresses this theme directly, depicting a massive flood that destroys human structures along a riverbank (Chakraborty, 2023). Rather than portraying the disaster simply as a tragedy, the narrative frames it as a powerful assertion of environmental sovereignty (Chakraborty, 2023).

Through an eco-critical lens, the river's surge represents a form of eco-emancipation, temporarily releasing the local ecosystem from human domination and extractive control (Chakraborty, 2023). The flood waters challenge the assumption that human engineering can permanently control natural forces (Chakraborty, 2023). For the protagonist, Sita, surviving the flood becomes a lesson in humility, teaching her to respect the river's dual nature as both a source of life and a force of destruction.

This dynamic illustrates that natural forces are completely independent of human desires, offering no promises of protection, wealth, or specific rewards (Rajkhowa, n.d.). Instead, the natural world operates by its own rules, requiring human societies to cultivate deep humility and adapt to environmental realities rather than trying to force compliance (M. Nathiya & Rema, 2024; Rajkhowa, n.d.).

Implications for Contemporary Indian Environmental Awareness

Ruskin Bond's regional fiction holds valuable insights for modern Indian environmental discourse, especially as the country navigates climate volatility, rapid habitat loss, and urban pollution (Atkulwar, 2023). While major environmental movements like the Chipko Movement or the Narmada Bachao Andolan rely on organized activism, Bond's stories offer a complementary path focused on daily, personal eco-consciousness (Kumar, 2025).

Bond's work indicates that substantive environmental awareness originates from routine, everyday acts of respect toward the natural world, which collectively foster a deeper sense of ecological responsibility (Kumar, 2025). By illustrating how his characters derive solace and belonging from their local ecosystems, Bond encourages readers to appreciate and safeguard their immediate natural environments (Mohammad, 2023).

"Nature doesn't promise you anything... Nature is a reward in itself." — Ruskin Bond, *The Book of Nature* (as cited in Rajkhowa, n.d., p. 8)

This worldview directly supports sustainable development by reminding modern societies that human life cannot be understood apart from the ecosystems that sustain it (Chandrasekaran, n.d.; Atkulwar, 2023). Bond's writing serves as an imaginative archive of the changing Himalayan landscape, preservation efforts, and the urgent need for a balanced co-existence between humans and the non-human world (Chandrasekaran, n.d.; Chakraborty, 2023).

Conclusion

Ultimately, Ruskin Bond's writings provide a valuable contribution to eco-critical discourse within Indian literature. By rejecting the view that nature is merely a resource for human consumption, his stories present a balanced model of interspecies coexistence where trees, rivers, and animals have an inherent right to exist and thrive (Chakraborty, 2023; Kumar, 2025).

Through his clear prose and focus on rural and small-town life, Bond makes complex environmental ethics accessible, showing that planetary care is rooted in empathy, respect, and generational responsibility (Anjan, 2018; Kumar, 2025). As the world faces accelerating ecological challenges, Bond's literature remains highly relevant, reminding readers that protecting the natural world is fundamentally tied to preserving humanity itself.

Works Cited

1. Anjan, N. "Ecological Concern in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories." *Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL)*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2018, pp. 168–173. <https://joell.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Ecological-Concern-in-Ruskin-Bond%E2%80%99s.pdf>.
2. Atkulwar, B. V. "Eco-consciousness in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories." *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Information Studies (IJRSSIS)*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2023, pp. 44–49. https://ijrssi.in/upload_papers/300520230633381_Atkulwar%20sir%20Paper.pdf.

3. Banerjee, P. "Redefining the River Discourse—The Angry River and India's River Woes." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v9n1.23>.
4. Bhowal, R. "Mountains, Forests, and Memory: Ecology in Ruskin Bond's Hill Stories." *Pen and Prosperity*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2025, pp. 307-313. <https://doi.org/10.70798/PP/020400040>.
5. Bhola, S. "Eco-Criticism, Activism & Awareness in the Writings of Ruskin Bond." *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 2023, pp. 23-40. https://www.bodhijournals.com/pdf/V8N3/Bodhi_V8N3_002.pdf.
6. Chandrasekaran, M. "An Exploration of Ecocriticism and Its Impact on Literature as Reflected in Ruskin Bond's Select Short Stories." *Journal of Indian Languages and Indian Literature in English (JILILE)*, vol. 2, no. 4, n.d., pp. 276–282. <https://resource.jilile.in/experiences/development/article-pdf/T7JSvcNeP.pdf>.
7. Chakraborty, D. S. "Beyond Ecodisaster: Locating the Ethos of 'Eco-emancipation' in Select Fiction of Ruskin Bond." *Vidyasagar University Journal of English Studies*, vol. 15, 2023, pp. 165–181. https://ir.vidyasagar.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/7350/1/16_Soumyadeep%20Chakraborty.pdf.
8. Garg, A. "An Ecocritical Study of Ruskin Bond's Select Short Stories." *IJELLH*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2018, p. 442. https://www.academia.edu/121379261/An_Ecocritical_Study_of_Ruskin_Bonds_Select_Short_Stories.
9. Hossain, M. S. "Ecopoetic Vision and Environmental Ethics in Rabindranath Tagore: A Literary, Cultural and Interdisciplinary Exploration of Nature and Sustainability." *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 2025, pp. 9-22. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i72095>.
10. Kumar, B. "Depiction of Nature in the Writings of Ruskin Bond and William Wordsworth." *AIJFR*, vol. 1, 2026. <https://www.aijfr.com/papers/2026/1/3078.pdf>.
11. Kumar, S. "Human–Nature Relationships in Ruskin Bond's Whispers of the Rain." *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2025, pp. 112–119. <https://galaxymrj.com/V14/n5/2025145013.pdf>.
12. Nathiya, M., and V. Rema. "Interdependence of Man and Nature: Nurture Nature for the Future." *Ecology, Environment and Conservation*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2024, pp. 908–911. <https://doi.org/10.53550/eec.2024.v30i02.081>.
13. Mathur, K. "Environmental Consciousness in Literature: An Ecocritical Perspective." *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45-60. https://www.raijmr.com/ijrhrs/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/IJRHS_2023_vol11_issue_03_06.pdf.
14. Mohammad, E. B. "Nature, Memory, and Identity in the Fiction of Ruskin Bond: A Critical Synthesis of Contemporary Scholarship." *Neliti Journal of Cultural and Psychological Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2023, pp. 115–124. <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/689503-nature-memory-and-identity-in-the-fictio-03681029.pdf>.
15. Mondal, S. "Practicing Eco-criticism: Nature and Sustainability in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories." *Creative Flight Journal*, 2026. <https://www.creativeflight.in/2026/02/practising-eco-criticism-nature-and.html>.
16. Monica, K., and D. A. K. Nayak. "Indigenous Ecological Wisdom and Ecocritical Consciousness in Mamang Dai's The Legends of Pensam." 2025. <https://doi.org/10.24113/smji.v13i8.11580>.
17. Nathiya, M., and V. Rema. "Ecological Consciousness in Indian Fiction." 2024, pp. 1-10. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nathiya->

[Muthu/publication/370103731_ECOLOGICAL_CONSCIOUSNESS_IN_INDIAN_FICTION/links/643f6645e881690c4be3f1dc/ECOLOGICAL-CONSCIOUSNESS-IN-INDIAN-FICTION.pdf](https://www.ijfmr.com/publication/370103731_ECOLOGICAL_CONSCIOUSNESS_IN_INDIAN_FICTION/links/643f6645e881690c4be3f1dc/ECOLOGICAL-CONSCIOUSNESS-IN-INDIAN-FICTION.pdf).

18. Nimmi, R. "Ecocritical Analysis of Selected Short Stories of Ruskin Bond." Bodhi International Journal, vol. 3, 2021. https://www.bodhijournals.com/pdf/V3N4/Bodhi_V3N4_005.pdf.
19. Rajkhowa, K. "Intertwining Nature with Humans: Unearthing Ecological Ramifications in Ruskin Bond's 'An Island of Trees.'" Journal of Assam Down Town University, vol. 4, no. 2, n.d., pp. 165–171. https://adtu.in/files/current_issue/vol4_issue2/vol4-issue2-article23.pdf.
20. Rückert, W. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Iowa Review, vol. 9, 1978. <https://climate-fiction.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/3add2-rueckertliteratureandecology.pdf>.
21. Sisodiya, J. "Nature, Innocence, and Moral Growth in Ruskin Bond's The Blue Umbrella." Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL), vol. 13, no. 1, 2026, pp. 38–43. <https://www.joell.in/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/38-43-NATURE-INNOCENCE-AND-MORAL-GROWTH-IN-RUSKIN-BONDS-THE-BLUE-UMBRELLA-1.pdf>.