

## Man-Nature Relationship in Ruskin Bond's Sequel Novels

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### Abstract

Every human being acquires knowledge through various experiences of 'nature'. Even just a passive observation of nature gives knowledge. The sea, sand, mountains, rivers, plants, animals, climate, temperature and seasons influence the character and thinking of a person. Environment influences persons and inspires them to live ecologically. The emotional attachment and commitment to a place influences a person's experience and shapes his personality. Eco-criticism is concerned with nature writing and ecological themes in all literature. The preservation of nature has always been a prime concern since the Vedic Times in India and the early Greek thought. Ruskin Bond's works portray one of the aspects of eco-criticism – the role of diversity and its connection with the environment's network structure. Diversity means many different relationships in a community which is aware of the interdependence of all its members.

Bond's debut novel *The Room on the Roof* is analyzed in association with the impact of environment on the character, Rusty. Secondly *Vagrants in the Valley* a sequel to *The Room on the Roof* is founded in relation to environment.

Rusty, the protagonist of the novel *The Room on the Roof* represents Bond's emotions and feelings in the environs of nature. The entire amount of Bond's works is a magnificent document of his deep association with environment. He finds delight in running with the winds, smiling with the flowers and converses with the trees. In the other novel also Rusty is being comforted and consoled by the parental presence or security in the form of trees. When it dances and glides to the song and touch of wind, it seems that his guardian is whispering to him. He experiences such a warmth and chillness and shade of a mother under the trees. Though Rusty's life has a big question mark, the environment changes him and makes him forget everything. He aspires for the goal he has to reach. It drives him to move forward.

From both *The Room on the Roof* and *Vagrants in the Valley*, Bond spreads the fragrance of vagrancy, torrents, friendship, and optimism of youth accompanying rain, mountains, hills, waterfalls, stream, river and breeze with its sights, sounds and smell of India. The weather and the climate retain an important symbolic significance to the story. Natural atmosphere has been a symbol of the inner psychic state of protagonist Rusty.

Bond's works, which explore the relationship between man and the denizens of Nature, seem to have inevitably come under the unconscious influence of various ecological studies.

**Keywords:** *Nature, Eco-criticism, Feeling, Environment, Humans.*



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Lawrence Buell defines Eco-criticism in 'The Future of Environmental Criticism' as "the environmentally oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice" (138). He identifies two phases of Eco-criticism the "first wave Eco-criticism" and "the second wave Eco-criticism" or "Revisionist Eco-criticism". The first wave writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction" (138). While first-wave eco-critics upheld the philosophy of organism, the second wave eco-critics inclined towards environmental justice issues and a "Social Eco-criticism" that takes urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as natural landscapes. (Buell 22). Ultimately Buell, acknowledges the fact that western academy focuses on Eco-criticism only as "environmental criticism" (28).

Eco-criticism is concerned with nature writing and ecological themes in all literature. The preservation of nature has always been a prime concern since the Vedic Times in India and the early Greek thought. As an academic discipline, it began in the 1992's although its origins go back to the late 1970's, when at the meetings of the Western Literature Association, a body whose field of interest is the literature of the American West, arose the concept of Eco-criticism and what Eco-criticism signifies. Prior to the emergence of environmental literary studies as an academic field in the late 1980's, there was no discourse of Eco-criticism. It appeared as a general discourse of nature writing. The early Eco-criticism seems to have been prompted only indirectly by environmentalism itself. Because, it is a new area of study, scholars are still engaged in defining the scope and aims of the subject. As an emerging discipline,

Eco-criticism still does not have a widely known set of assumptions, doctrines or procedures.

Eco-criticism is nature interdisciplinary; it draws on environmental studies, the natural sciences, and cultural and social studies. The awareness of Eco-criticism has been there since the dawn of civilization. The poets, artists, and thinkers have been emphasizing the close kinship between nature and man from times immemorial. Human life is inconceivable without the presence of wider nature.

There is one writer whose work show environment not only as an important or dominant theme, but there is also concern for natural depletion that is taking place. The man is Ruskin Bond. The natural scenic hill of Dehradun and Mussoorie almost invariably form the setting of his works and reflects his ardent faith in the healing powers of nature. He shows his worry for the un-thoughtful actions of man towards nature. Through his short stories for children and through his fiction, he has tried to convey an important message to everyone, that is, the importance of nature in our life.

Bond's works portray one of the aspects of eco-criticism – the role of diversity and its connection with the environment's network structure. Diversity means many different relationships in a community which is aware of the interdependence of all its members. Diversity will enrich all the relationship and thus enrich the community as a whole, as well as each individual member. The important message that Ruskin Bond conveys through his works is the need to understand ecological principles (interdependence, partnership, flexibility and diversity – the consequence of which is sustainability) on the basis of which a harmonious relationship can be established with the physical world of nature.

Bond subscribes to a holistic world view according to which the world is an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts, recognizing the fundamental independence of all phenomena. The most important lesson that is implicitly taught by Bond through his works is that if one has absolute faith in the innocence and goodness of nature as the manifestation of the Divine power, one will feel compelled to discover a redeeming feature in it.

Great writers always provide their readers with hints for the critical tools with which to evaluate their work. Bond's works, which explore the relationship between

man and the denizens of Nature, seem to have inevitably come under the unconscious influence of various ecological studies.

Bond's debut novel *The Room on the Roof* is analyzed in association with the impact of environment on the character, Rusty. Secondly *Vagrants in the Valley* a sequel to *The Room on the Roof* is founded in relation to environment.

Rusty, the protagonist of the novel *The Room on the Roof* represents Bond's emotions and feelings in the environs of nature. The entire amount of Bond's works is a magnificent document of his deep association with environment. He finds delight in running with the winds, smiling with the flowers and converses with the trees.

In *The Room on the Roof*, Bond handles natural phenomena such as: India, Himalaya, hill station, forest, bazaar, maidan and city, seasons; monsoon with rain and storm and spring and mist, flora: trees, bushes, weeds, flowers, garden, and fauna: jackal and snake, Elements: water, soil, sunlight and moon. Another important feature, landscape which is generally carried out for scenic background, appears in a prominent role in Bond's fiction. Bond's vivid descriptions have functional value. They lend to the plot proper understanding of the land, Rusty. The direct contact with nature leads Rusty to increase mental health. He has experienced many psychological benefits of nature, which are desirable and healthy in this novel. In the environs of nature Rusty learns to live independently, to decide on his own, to this positively, to mingle with peers and to have hope on future.

The novel starts with the beautiful descriptions of transient season and its impact on the protagonist, Rusty. Rain makes him crazy; he feels his nerves dancing with the pitter-patter of first shower. The long road winds round the hills, rises and falls and twists down to Dehra. The road comes from the mountains and passes through the jungle and the valley and reaches Dehra and ends in the bazaar. Rusty feels the atmosphere and smiles as the 'rain' flecks his face and he too likes the smell and the freshness of it.

The noise and hubbub of bazaar tempted him in the morning. But it is now deserted and forlorn. The depiction of the scene explicitly focuses the condition of lonely and dismayed Rusty. Rusty sees the reflection of his own ruinous condition in the lean dog, in sad song of the women and in the cry of the jackal. The fear and the

anxiety of Rusty are characteristically revealed through the setting of scene. Rusty is lonely and homeless yet he is hopeful for tomorrow. He knows that he is alone only for today but tomorrow his friends are going to accompany him and help him. The pictorial description provided by Bond set the mood and tone of the story.

Rusty's agony is aggravated by the presence of moon. The moon came out from a cloud, and played with his wet glistening body and revealed the vast, naked loneliness of the Maidan and his own insignificance and he longs for the presence of the people. He is certain that he will never return to his guardian. There is a drizzle also but he never minds the rain. The drizzle symbolizes the sickness in Rusty's mind. It stands for nuisance, annoyance and it binds Rusty's inactive crouching under the bench and he becomes wet, cold and muddy and the feeling of helplessness and self pity grab him. Rusty has got a job of a teacher to Kishen, and he can have a room of his own and his food with Mr. Kapoor's family. Rusty feels gay and light-hearted and all the troubles in the world are scurried and he feels successfully.

Bond expels the new beginning of Rusty's life, his first morning in the room in relation to nature. At first everything was dark. While the sun rises the darkness lifted like the raising of a veil and the sun reached up over the trees and hills and it sent one beam of light through the window. The sun beam creeps across the bed, and up the Rusty's legs to get up. In summer, the day of the picnic has come. The seasonal change is delineated by the ripened litchis and mangoes. Meena proposes the picnic in the forest near Dehra. The picnic provides the chance of exhibiting the love of Rusty and Meena finds a vibrant expression in the serenity of the 'forest'. Bond quotes in his 'Book of Nature' "to live harmony with nature we must become good listeners". (188)

Nature emerges as a powerful background conveying the spirit of the story. Bond is skilled in painting word landscapes in accordance to the motif of the plot. For example, in the novel *The Room on the Roof* various turns in the life of Rusty are responded by nature. Holi, the festival of spring, brings rejuvenation in his life. The rain washes away the marks of Mr. Harrison's stern guardianship from his consciousness. The serene forest stimulates Meena and Rusty to woo each other. The fearful storm at night and appearance of the jackal in the room intensify their sense of gloom caused by Meena's death.

Bond's scenic nature always seems to be friendly and it leaves a feeling of warmth and security in the hearts of the readers. Bond has an intimate relationship with the Himalayas. His writing style is distinct in a way that it tries to make the reader, understand the landscape and ethos through carefully mastered words. His novels manifest a deep love for nature and people. The natural settings of Himalayas, the valleys of Dehradun, the gorgeous city of Missouri, tales of encounter with myriad animals, the minute details of flora and fauna of the region in addition to the timeless characters add beauty and grace to the writings of Bond worth cherishing. Even though Bond has been living in a city that is in the midst of nature, he does not like the city life as such. Bond says in his *Book of Nature*, "In an odd way, it was my reaction to city life that led to my taking a greater interest in the natural world. Up to that time, I had taken it all for granted". (39)

*Vagrants in the Valley* picks up from where the first novel *The Room on the Roof* ends. Rusty is joined in his travel by Kishen, another 'run away'. As they venture further into the unknown, they discover new friends Devinder and Sudheer. Rusty participates in more escapades and also begins to understand the complexities of growing up. It binds with evocation of youth, innocence and friendship along with sights, smells and sounds of Indian plains and hills.

Bond portrays their vagrancy in simple syntax that the road stretched ahead, lonely and endless towards the hills. Dust is in their clothes, eyes and even mouths. "The sun is straight and they walk, the sweat trickles down their armpits and down their legs". (117) The dusty, rough track leads them to the wilderness near Dehra. Vagrancy is also symbolic of a crucial desert phase, which anyone encounters in the way of their life. It also represents a struggle in order to grab some settlement in life.

The change of life of Rusty and Kishen is portrayed through the change of the green and fruitful backdrop unlike in the beginning of the novel. The natural atmosphere serves as a mirror to reflect the plot of the novel. The dry, dusty and stony road reflects the desert phase of Rusty's life while the valley filled with orchards is a reflection of the oasis they reach to live and to rest. Bond's words and language, dance according to the mood of the natural settings and characters' mentality.

The trees and the plants, assume the role of a guardian spirit. Bond admits that trees are his consciousness. They are the only witness to his writings. He makes novels, stories on these favourite trees and he shares it with his readers. Trees appear to welcome him and it seems that they are familiar with him. They appear to be the shaping spirit of his dear father. Bond feels their heart warming supervision. Amita Aggarwal quotes in *The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*: “The trees stand watch over my day-to-day life. They are the guardian of my conscience. I do what I think, they would approve the most” (121).

In *Vagrants in the Valley*, whenever Rusty feels alone, or troubles grab him, or no hope of future, next moment Bond makes him, with his friends along with the natural environment of trees pool and stream. Rusty is being comforted and consoled by the parental presence or security in the form of trees. When it dances and glides to the song and touch of wind, it seems that his guardian is whispering to him. He experiences such a warmth and chillness and shade of a mother under the trees. Though Rusty’s life has a big question mark, the environment changes him and makes him forget everything. He aspires for the goal he has to reach. It drives him to move forward.

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Bond has a long association with nature due to his humble living in the midst of it for nearly sixty years. Throughout his life, Bond has observed keenly the different shades of nature. Mountains, rivers, valleys, glades, bowers, forests and animals have been his companions in his literary world as in his real life. Bond is aware that man is essentially a product of the environment and as such it is difficult for him to survive without interaction with the environment.



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