

The Representation of Nature and Ecology in Ruskin Bond's Selected Short Stories: An Ecocritical Approach

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Abstract

This paper looks into how nature is portrayed in short stories written by Ruskin Bond, among his selected short stories, namely The Night Train at Deoli, The Blue Umbrella, Angry River, The Cherry Tree and A Face in the Dark, using the ecocritical approach. Based on the theories offered by Lawrence Buell and Cheryl Glotfelty, the paper explores the way in which Bond transcends the anthropocentric approach in order to introduce nature as dynamic and meaningful. The analysis shows that landscapes, rivers, trees, and weather are agents that influence human feelings and activities and ethical awareness instead of passive backgrounds.

The paper also addresses the subject of human-nature harmony by revealing that Bond child protagonists attain empathy and earth-awareness by simply living in daily contact with nature. His stories are narrations of coexistence through the aspects of adaptation, restraints and belonging, and the interconnection between human and nonhuman life. Through environmental ecology, ecofacedness, and ecological harmony, environmental consciousness is developed through Bond fiction, which promotes ethical dwelling within the limits of nature.

It is concluded from the research that the short stories of Bond can make a valuable contribution to ecocritical literature, as they include the ecological receptivity due to basic and experiential narration. His works provide a literary prototype of environmental sustainability that is based on a sense of place and respect for nature and is applicable in the present environmental issues setting.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ruskin Bond, nature representation, ecology, short stories, anthropocentrism.

1. Introduction

The critical lens of ecocriticism appears in the late 20th century, mainly with the book *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) by two authors, Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, defining

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ecocriticism as the relationship between literature and the physical environment approached in an interdisciplinary way, integrating ecological science and inquiry into humanity. This move arose with the growing environmental crises, where literary analysis ceased to be anthropocentric, based on paradigms, and became ecocentric, highlighting human domination in nature. Environmental imagination Pioneers such as Lawrence Buell further refined and developed it, emphasising the significance of promoting ethical living and non-human agency through text reading.

Ruskin Bond, an Anglo-Indian writer and a prolific writer of ecocritic ethos, is a proponent of this ecocritic ethos in his stories that are based in the green setting of Mussoorie and Dehradun. The nature in his chosen short work, including *The Night Train at Deoli* and *The Blue Umbrella*, is not the inanimate object but a living, breathing presence in the form of rivers that flow, trees that talk, and monsoons that change and redefine human existence. The rhythm of ecology is expressed in the narratives that Bond presents, which are sometimes nostalgic but prophetic due to his lifetime residency in these bioregions, giving them the ability to capture ecological aspects in the face of modernisation pressures that post-colonial India faced.

The present paper will take the position that the stories chosen by Bond, namely, *The Night Train at Deoli*, *The Blue Umbrella*, *The Angry River*, *The Cherry Tree*, and *A Face in the Dark*, comment on the anthropocentric lack of connection to nature and propose bioregional harmony and ecocentrism using the aspects of place-sense, agency, and fragility. Through the lenses of ecocritical theories such as the environmental text criteria of Buell and place-based ethics, it reveals that Bond creates a sense of ecological awareness in his works as he bridges gaps in the scholarly analysis of the child and nature associations in his novels.

2. Literature Review

The literature review examines the background literature on ecocriticism and its implementation on Ruskin Bond to establish theoretical developments and gaps in the research that may be addressed in your paper.

The Ecocriticism Reader allowed ecocriticism to become an interdisciplinary term, studying the ecological impact of literature on environmental ethics, that led to the climate fiction crisis, such as litho-climate fiction, an influence of nature writing, and eco-criticism using alternative formulations, and eco-critical theory. The *Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell (1995) established signposts to environmentally orientated texts which involved nonhuman agency and pollution critique that formulate the analysis of place-based texts. Other scholars, such as Greg Garrard (*Ecocriticism*, 2004), later extended into ecofeminism and urban ecology, where he highlighted the potential of literature to encourage people to act as stewards during the Anthropocene.

Many works apply ecocriticism to the writings of Ruskin Bond, which are considered ecologically

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minded due to his depictions of the Himalayas. In her article, *An Ecocritical Reading of Selected Short Stories of Ruskin Bond* (2016), Dhaliwal examines the vitality of nature in stories such as *The Cherry Tree*, with emphasis on the child-nature relationships in opposition to deforestation. The article "Ecocritical Perspectives on Chosen Stories of Ruskin Bond" by Nagar (2024) emphasises the illustration of nature's indifference by Bond and its conservation as well as its connection to actual crises such as landslides in Joshimath. In much the same way, an anonymous ecocritical (2024) interpretation of Academia.edu examines the nature of the human-nature connection to Bond shorts out of ethical responsibility.

2.1 Research Gaps

Even as these works confirm the eco-themes of Bond, such as agency in rivers/trees and harmony through empathy, few of them dwell specifically only upon the ecological symbolism, e.g., bioregional place-sense, in foothills. In an excessive focus on novels, short fiction fails to focus on anthropocentrism and fragility; therefore, this paper discusses the short fiction in connection with the frameworks proposed by Buell.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the ecocritical prisms needed to analyse the chosen short stories by Ruskin Bond, as the study is based on the known paradigms and adjusts to his Himalayan narratives.

3.1 Core Ecocritical Approaches

Ecocriticism favours ecocentrism, which is the direct value of nature outside the usefulness of mankind, and it opposes anthropocentric hierarchies, which subjugate the nonhuman world. The four attributes defining an environmental text by Lawrence Buell include nonhuman agency, human-nature interaction, ecological ethics of dwelling, and pollution consciousness, which can be used as a guiding compass in the interpretation of Bond and his landscapes as not mere sites but agents. Place-sense, theorised by Kent Ryden and Yi-Fu Tuan, lays stress on local belongingness to particular bioregions, such as the foothills of Mussoorie, where Bond creates narratives of bodiless engagement with trees, rivers, and monsoons that make one a part of the place and hesitate to put one elsewhere.

3.2 Methodological Tools

Ecological symbolism is revealed when trees, which symbolise strength, are contrasted with decaying plants, which symbolise weakness, and the bond-linking motifs conveyed by Bond to actual crises, such as the deforestation of the Himalayas, are disclosed through close reading. According to Val Plumwood, ecofeminism is applied selectively to gender tropes of nature (e.g., nurturing valleys as mothers) and is critical of the dualisms that help remove humans from ecology. Such strategies

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converge at a point where a qualitative hermeneutic understanding of stories seeks to address the environmental precarity of the bioregion in a way that would restore harmony.

4. Methodology

The methodology presents a logical way of conducting an ecocritical analysis of the short stories chosen by Ruskin Bond, by which a high standard of textual analysis is guaranteed.

4.1 Research Design

This paper employs qualitative textual analysis based on ecocriticism, concentrating on close reading as a way of digging up ecological motifs and themes. Bond purposefully selected five short stories – The Night Train at Deoli, The Blue Umbrella, The Angry River, The Cherry Tree, and A Face in the Dark – because they richly represent the Himalayan ecology, including cycles of growth and decay, sentient landscapes, and human-nature conflicts, as seen in her collection, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (1991).

4.2 Selection Justification

Selections are more narrative-orientated, relating to depictions of bioregional details (foothill flora/fauna, monsoons) and an empathetic gaze of children, enhancing what are known as the ecocritical worries, such as place-sense and precariousness, that Bond does not assert in the wider corpus of her work. Rogers took recourse to canonical Penguin/Viking editions to obtain stories without novels and stay within the confines of concise fiction.

5. Analysis Chapters

5.1 Chapter 1: Nature as Agency

The two prevailing paradigms of nature are: one views nature as a passive background in literature, while the other sees it as active in people's lives. Ecocriticism criticises the former by focusing more on the agency of the nonhuman world. Lawrence Buell makes the argument that an environmental text is one in which the environment other than humankind is not just a framing component but rather a presence which began to imply the involvement of human history in natural history (Buell, 1995). In the short stories that Ruskin Bond chose to write, nature is not just scenery but a force that drives emotion, memory, morality, and even action. Combining the personification, causality of the environment, and personal interaction, Bond transfers agency onto landscapes, rivers, weather, and trees and thus subverts the anthropocentric hierarchies, promoting the ecocentric worldview.

5.1.1 Personified Landscapes and Living Environments

Landscape animation is one of the most intended elements of the Bond narrative world. Hills, forests, and skies act like conscious creatures, which observe and react to human characters and can even

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lead them. This approach to narrative fits well with the ecocriticism discussed, which describes the state of ecology and the relationship of literature to the physical elements of the world, specifically the ability of text to envision nonhuman vitality (Glotfelty 9).

The abandoned railway platform in *The Night Train* at Deoli is not a blank space, and it is an emotive place. Stillness of the station brings a feeling of longing, memory, and attachment to the narrator. The repetition of seasonal feelings—such as the quiet dawn, smoky foothills, and fading twilight—conveys that the site retains the remnants of the narrator's emotional continuity. The station serves as a life memory bank, storing human emotions outside of temporal existence. The landscape is thus a source of recall instead of the actual geographical point.

On the same note, in *A Face in the Dark*, the forest road in the middle of the night does not merely serve as the setting of the supernatural encounter; it is actually an active generator of fear by generating darkness, silence, and isolation in space. There is also a psychological tension that exists independently of human intent, created by the trees, shadows, and lack of sound. The horror experienced by the protagonist is not created by a visible opposing object but rather by environmental circumstances, suggesting that the environment itself plays an active role in the narrative. According to Garrard, ecocritical writings have been found to unbalance the manmade command by displaying an environmental setting that is incapable of interpretation or domination (Garrard, 2012). Such resistance is embodied in the forest where Bond finds himself.

5.1.2 Rivers, Weather, and Environmental Causality

The stories of nature in Bond also directly cause the human life and therefore, cement the ecocritical notion of nonhuman agency. In *Angry River*, the river emerges as something defining survival, movement and emotional endurance. It does not symbolically or decoratively flood the protagonist but actually alters his or her situation. The river imposes alienation, makes a man adaptive and redefines human understanding of safety. The story thus transfers the authority of human will to the work of nature.

According to Buell, this is one of the characteristics of environmental writing: human fate is dependent on ecological systems, not outside of them (Buell, 1995). The river of the Bond story is an example of ecological independence: it does not punish or defend people; it just works based on natural cycles. But its behaviours restructure human existence and show agency in the form of consequence instead of consciousness.

The same can be said about weather in *The Blue Umbrella*. The mountain climate and the monsoon rains control the social interaction, the mobility and the desire. The usefulness of the umbrella is not linked to the human economy but to the need of the environment. Rain provides social and moral arenas under which there is generation and moral envy. The moral story is created in this way by the ecological circumstances. The world turns into a story providing what leads to moral change.

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5.1.3 Trees and Slow Agency

The Cherry Tree is by far one of Bond's most ecocritically meaningful portrayals of agency. However, contrary to the dramatic power of the river or storm, the tree is a symbol of gradual, temporal agency, which ecocritics commonly refer to as 'slow ecological time'. The main character plants a seed that grows over time, insidiously influencing his patience, responsibility, and comprehension of life's transformations.

The structure of the tree shapes the timeline of the plot: different seasons define the periods of development, and nature replaces human urgency. This illustrates Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of place-experience, which posits that habitual exposure to an environment fosters a sense of identity and belonging (Tuan, 1977). The boy grows alongside the tree, suggesting mutual growth rather than a one-sided development of human beings. This tree is not merely an object of possession; rather, it acts as a joint agent in the process of shaping subjectivity.

Val Plumwood believes that anthropocentric thinking treats nature as a resource and refuses to acknowledge it as a living being (Plumwood, 1993). Bond resists this reduction. The cherry tree outlasts the goats, withstands the weather, and endures neglect, asserting its existence despite human forces. It does not teach the boy humility by learning how to control nature, but rather he observes how it continues. Subtle but transformative nature educates and does not serve the agency in this case.

5.1.4 Emotional and Ethical Agency

Apart from the physical cause and effect, Bond also influences emotional and moral awareness. His child heroes often show sympathy to animals, trees, and sceneries. This empathy is born not as an outcome of moral education but rather as a result of being in the environment. The environment creates responsibility, nostalgia and caring.

Ecocriticism identifies this affective response as ecological consciousness, an awareness that challenges the human-nature distinction (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996). Bond asserts that exposure to the environment enables emotional development. Companionship is bringing the feeling of loneliness down; the feeling of fear due to the unfamiliar land and maturity is brought on through observations of the seasons. Nature is, consequently, didactic.

Notably, this agency does not idolise nature like humans do; it gives humans an opportunity to live according to nonhuman standards. The stories demonstrate that characters find peace when they embrace environmental constraints. When characters oppose or prostrate themselves in front of the woods, defy the stream, or attempt to possess what they do not already have, they experience anxiety. Ecological participation is what leads to ethical understanding.

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5.1.5 Ecocentric Implications

Bond dehumanises anthropocentrism by introducing nature as an actor instead of an object. The environment does not subjugate humans in these stories, but rather they are negotiating with it. The focus of the narrative is often reversed to nonhuman processes: Rivers make decisions about safety; trees keep time; weather defines relationships; and landscapes hold memories. This style can be attributed to Buell's notion of environmental imagination, in which literature instills an ethical habitation of the ecological systems (Buell, 1995).

The Himalayan locations that Bonds utilises hold significant importance, as they center on the concept of bioregional identity. The foothills are their own ecological community and can't be replaced by anything else. Repetitive scenes of mist, oak forests, mountain trails, and monsoon cycles provide the persistence of the stories, contributing to the recognition of the fact that human life exists in the context of everlasting ecological cycles. This sense of place is accounted for by the concept of place-sense, introduced by Kent Ryden: recognising the land makes one belong and accountable (Ryden, 2001). The characters in Bond are members of the hills, not as proprietors but as fellow residents.

6. Chapter 2: Human-Nature Harmony

Even though the last chapter has defined nature as an agent in the short fiction of Ruskin Bond, the next aspect of ecocriticism involves the bond that arises between humans and nature. The stories that Bond creates are not just descriptions of the presence of nature, but they depict coexistence. His narratives recurrently predict harmony and not dominance, participation and not exploitation, and belonging and not ownership. The ecocritical trend of substituting anthropocentrism with ecocentrism is reflected by such representations of humans as part of an ecological community instead of the masters of its domination (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996).

Lawrence Buell refers to environmentally orientated literature as literature that promotes ethical orientation dwelling, a form of existence that acknowledges interdependences between human and nonhuman existence (Buell, 1995). Child heroes and rural settings, daily experiences of animals, trees, seasons of the year, and weather are examples of this principle used by Bond in her fiction. Peace on earth in his tales is not a dreamy escapism or romanticism divorced from earthly matters but an in-the-field ecological activity informed by sympathy, self-control, and continuity.

6.1.1 Childhood Innocence and Ecological Sensibility

The children in Bond stories act as the bridges between humanity and nature. The children do not confront the environment in a moralistic way, as adults do when considering utility and profit; instead, they approach it as explorers and form friendships with it. This is a plot typical of ecocritical studies that present ecological consciousness commonly attained by informal, phenomenological

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interactions with nature rather than an abstract ideology (Garrard, 2012).

In *The Cherry Tree*, the boy tends to the plant not to produce fruit and acquire material gain but due to emotional attachment. His forbearance represents an adjustment to ecological time rather than an attempt to manipulate human understanding. He takes a lesson in enduring seasons, drought, and destruction. It is a two-way process: he takes care of the tree, and the tree shapes his adulthood. This reciprocity shows coexistence rather than hierarchy.

Accordingly, in *Angry River*, the child protagonist does not view the flood as a form of aggression; instead, he sees it as a natural process that requires readjustment. Gradually, fear is transforming into understanding. The river does not belong to either of the sides: enemy or servant; it is a part of the continuity of life. Acceptance by the child is a manifestation of ecological literacy's knowledge that it is essential to cooperate with environmental processes rather than fighting them.

These descriptions are echoed in the theory of the experiential place of Yi-Fu Tuan, wherein identity is created and shaped through recurrent interaction with the environment (Tuan, 1977). In Bond's stories, child characters do not visit nature; instead, they germinate within it.

6.1.2 Everyday Coexistence in Rural Landscapes

The Himalayan villages depicted by Bond symbolise harmony in everyday life. Human beings, animals, climatic conditions and geography are all interdependent components of a common environment. Relations with nature are close and personal due to the lack of invasion by the industries.

In *The Blue Umbrella*, the hills have a key influence on trade, travel, and social exchange. The umbrella is perceived as meaningful due to the climate conditions; it mediates the interaction among villagers. Generosity in the end conquers possessiveness, and therefore it implies that peace with nature breeds peace among man. Ecocriticism often appeals to social ethics because it connects ecological problems with the concept of environmental ethics, suggesting that environmental exploitation can be compared to social exploitation (Plumwood, 1993). Bond implicitly explains this correlation: a sense of moral balance is created out of respect for the environment.

In *The Night Train at Deoli*, we find harmony in the sentiment that the narrator expresses about the place. The repeated nature of the visits to the station brings out a cycle of nature in relation to the dawn and the season. The environment destabilises identity. Instead of feeling the need to escape the quietness of the country, the narrator finds solace in it. This concept is a manifestation of Buell's ethics of dwelling, where belonging becomes a cultural value rather than mobility (Buell, 1995).

6.1.3 Animals and Nonhuman Companionship

Commonly, Bond uses animals as companions, but not resources. Their exposure makes cross-species

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coexist, and the breakdown of hierarchical differences between human and nonhuman life demonstrates normalisation.

He does not exoticise or sentimentalise animals in his stories; he gives them space as it is. This exemplification is in accordance with ecocentric philosophy, which acknowledges intrinsic value to nonhuman life (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996). The characters treat the animals with concern, not fear or dominance, implying an ethic based on coexistence.

It is through these kinds of interactions that Bond questions the anthropocentric suppositions of human superiority in intelligence and command. The environment is turned into a common home of multiple forms of life, which have equal rights to exist.

Animals in his stories are neither exoticized nor sentimentalized; they share space naturally. This representation aligns with ecocentric philosophy, which recognizes intrinsic value in nonhuman life (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Characters respond to animals with care and familiarity rather than fear or domination, suggesting an ethical framework grounded in coexistence.

Through such interactions, Bond challenges anthropocentric assumptions that privilege human intelligence and control. The environment becomes a shared home inhabited by multiple forms of life, each possessing legitimate presence.

6.1.4 Harmony Through Acceptance of Limits

An important feature of ecological harmony, according to Bond, is moderation. His characters hardly make an effort to control nature: they simply adjust to it. Seasons control the nature of movement, monsoons control the nature of shelter, and terrain controls occupation. Control is substituted with acceptance.

According to Val Plumwood, the ecological crisis results from the human illusion of a segregated position between nature and humanity (Plumwood, 1993). Bond uses his stories to refute this illusion by using boundaries as natural and not as oppressive. When the environmental boundaries are respected, characters feel secure and a part of the environment. Characters can only become uncomfortable when they oppose or ignore ecological facts.

Alienation causes fear in *A Face in the Dark*, where the main character finds himself threatened by the fact that his home is an unknown place in the forest. The absence of human connection to the environment creates an unsettling atmosphere. Peace is hence not greater in terms of being environmental but in terms of human consciousness.

The impact of emotional ecology and sense of belonging on the emotional state of a workgroup member is currently explored in studies conducted by academics such as Rusbult and Zimbardo (1993) and Zheng et al. (2019).

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6.1.5 Emotional Ecology and Sense of Belonging

Bond's stories repeatedly link emotional stability and environmental connection. Hills, rivers, and trees serve as resting places for characters, suggesting that only ecological integration can establish psychological well-being. This concept relates to the ecocritical concept of affective ecology, where a landscape has an effect on a human's affective condition.

The hills over several stories serve as reassurance and continuity spaces. The commonality of memory, nostalgia, and identity exists within natural environments rather than urban settings. According to place-sense theory by Kent Ryden, this attachment is the result of familiarity, which causes ethical responsibility to the environment (Ryden, 2001). Bond's characters protect the values they cherish, demonstrating that conservation begins with love rather than control.

Respect is not an individual matter; it involves collective behaviours, workshops, and assessments within the community framework.

6.1.6 Ecocentric Vision of Community

Respect is not a matter of individuality; it is a collective behaviour, workshop, and evaluation in the context of the community.

Finally, Bond portrays a harmony within the community that extends beyond individual relationships. Villages, as ecological communities, rely on collective knowledge of seasons, locations, and resources to ensure their survival. Human relationships reflect the cooperative balance found in the environment, which replaces competition.

This dream is a contrast to the anthropocentric culture of consumption and growth in the modern world. Bond does not glorify poverty and isolation; instead, he highlights the sustainable coexistence that exists in life. His fiction consequently puts forward an ethical paradigm: communities thrive when they are in concert with ecological cycles.

7. Conclusion

The current research was aimed at analysing the ecological vision innate to the chosen short stories of Ruskin Bond with the help of an ecocritical approach. Through discussing *The Night Train at Deoli*, *The Blue Umbrella*, *Angry River*, *The Cherry Tree* and *A Face in the Dark*, the research proves that Bond in her fiction has continually questioned anthropocentric assumptions and, in their place has developed an ecocentric interpretation of human existence. As he narrates in his works, nature is not a geographical location but a breathing being, which builds memory, morality, and identity.

The initial chapter of the analysis sets out a stipulation that Bond presents nature as an agency. Topography, water, forests, climate and trees control occurrences and reactions in the mind. These elements guide human actions, create emotions, dictate the outcomes of narratives, and fulfil

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Lawrence Buell's criteria for what constitutes environmental literature, where human history is integrally merged with natural processes (Buell, 1995). In the stories, it is shown that the nonhuman world is causal: the river defines who can survive, the forest creates fear, and the tree organises time and growth. By doing this, Bond dismantles the hierarchical barriers that separate the human subject from the natural object.

Chapter Two demonstrates how Bond fiction elevates agency to a state of harmony. Human characters, especially children, become taught to live in harmony with ecological rhythms instead of attempting to dominate over them. The stories highlight empathy, modesty and familiarity as pillars of moral existence. The daily life of the village communicates a sustainable paradigm of living based on coping with before and after seasons, geography, and biodiversity. With these representations, Bond is also consistent with ecocritical discourse that regards environmental ethics as having no association with social and emotional health (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996). Peace is not achieved when the subjects are romanticised but when they are aware of their interdependence.

A combination of these findings portrays an ecological philosophy. Bond, in his stories, concludes that humans can feel stable only when they embrace environmental boundaries. The fear and conflict are experienced when people believe that they are out of touch with nature, and a sense of belonging is cultivated by paying specific attention to place. The location of this philosophy is the Himalayas: it is not a scenic backdrop but rather a bioregional space, which develops responsibility and identity. The repetitiveness of seasons, hills, rain, and plants provides continuity in the stories, with the central theme being that human life progresses in cyclical patterns of continuity.

The paper thus contributes to ecocritical literature by demonstrating the importance of Bond's simpler fiction, which has often been overlooked in comparison to his novels and nostalgic interpretations. His cynical accounts provide potent ecological commentaries in an understated narrative style instead of obvious environmental activism. Through the description of daily co-existence, Bond promotes environmentally conscious ecology based on love and experience but not abstraction. It is implied in his work that the first step in developing environmental awareness is realising how alive the immediate and everyday surroundings are.

Bond's stories are increasingly relevant today due to the environmental crisis and the growing disconnect between humans and their natural surroundings. They offer literature as a tool that can help us be sensitive to ecological systems and create sustainable attitudes. The narratives do not present technological solutions; instead, they focus on creating an ethical perception that emphasises a sense of human belonging rather than mastery over the natural world.

After all, the kind of living espoused in the short stories by Ruskin Bond is that of humility, care, and coexistence. His fiction welcomes readers on an invitation to re-examine their relationship with nature and see nature as an actual partner in human life through the techniques of agency and

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harmony. The environmental awareness ingrained in these stories highlights the unending nature of literature's role in forming environmental imagination and accountability.

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