

A Study of Ruskin Bond's Human Relationship with Nature in *the Trees of Dehra*

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Abstract

In this research explores about the earth, there is a bond between nature and humans. Humans play a vital role in nature, just like other living things. Mankind is a part of nature, but they forget about their part and think that they are superior to everything. But the people who have been living with nature know nature's true value. The nature and human relationship is an essential part of life. Mingling with nature is a prominent act of human life, because humans need nature at every moment, though they are unaware of this. If humans understand the fundamental relationship with nature everyone would become a lover of nature, Nature also serves as an inspiration in human activities like art, architecture engineering, lifestyle and literature. Nature influenced many writers to produce their literary works, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelly, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and many other writers. Nature influenced them and they were writing about nature in their works. Ruskin Bond also writes about nature in his works that portray his own reflection. It shows his relationship with nature. Ruskin Bond is a writer from the Himalayan rural area, who has been living there for more than fifty years. That place became a part of Ruskin Bond's life and works. Most of Ruskin Bond's stories picturises the nature surrounding where he lives. Ruskin Bond's parents and grandparents taught him to live with nature. This research traces Ruskin Bond's relationship with nature through his collection of short stories *The Trees of Dehra*. Natural surroundings provide endless materials to his writings in the form of trees, mountains, animals, flowers, rivers, etc. Through this collection of short stories Ruskin Bond gives a description of nature and human-nature relationships.

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Human-Nature Relationship in Ruskin Bond's work:

Human-Nature Relation is the main concept in Ruskin Bond's works that portray his own relationship with nature or his observation of other humans' relationship with nature. Ruskin Bond's characters build a relationship with nature. Ruskin Bond considers trees as his friend. In the introduction of *The Trees of Dehra*, Ruskin Bond states "All trees are friendly, but some trees are friendlier than others" (7). Ruskin Bond shares his experience and feelings towards the trees. While Ruskin came back to India after a long stay abroad, he felt that the fragrance of mango blossoms welcomed him, he enjoyed the golden fruit and the leaves gave him shade and shelter. During the spring season the trees of Himalayan foothills with its blossoms and fruit give life to mountains. Whenever Ruskin Bond saw a jack fruit tree, he remembered the old jackfruit tree in Dehradun, which is in his grandma's bungalow. In the winter season the chestnut trees are empty while in spring they have new leaves and blossoms. Then Ruskin Bond mentions the hundred years old banyan tree. These have created an impact on Ruskin Bond.

Ruskin Bond is a great observer of nature, his stories reveal that. Ruskin Bond shares human-nature relationships in a detailed manner, but in simple words. In the short story "The Trees are Walking" Ruskin explores that not only do human beings have feelings towards nature but also nature in the form of trees, too has feelings towards mankind. It is a story about Koki and her grandmother but nature is the protagonist. Koki's grandmother shares her experience with his father in the garden. Koki's grandmother taught by her father about the life of nature. Now Koki's grandmother teaches Koki. Whenever humans transform their bond with nature there is a continuation of nature-human relationship. Koki's grandmother was attached with nature and follows the way of her father's ideology with nature. In the beginning Koki's grandmother felt some sort of loneliness in the garden without her father, when he came back the trees also became happy. The trees also have bonds with humans because they move towards those they love. Koki's grandma told that she was never able to get over the

feelings of her father about the trees and plants. Koki's grandma and great grandpa loved nature and trees. So, they plant and protect trees. Though trees grew in their house they did not cut it down. They protected a peepal tree by building a new temple. Koki's grandma after describing her experience, she asked Koki a question about where she wanted to live with the trees in the village or the building in the cities. Koki answered with trees.

Ruskin Bond's short stories in semi-auto biographical tone, express his own life. In the short story "The Cottage called Maplewood", Ruskin Bond describes the cottage, where he stayed and portrays its surroundings of nature. When Ruskin Bond moved to the cottage, it was a seventy years old cottage being part of the forest, between the Oak and Maple trees. The cottage was called Maplewood because "There was one very tall, very old maple above the cottage, and this was the tree that gave the house its name" (55). Before Ruskin Bond arrived at the cottage, birds nestled in the eaves, even his stay in the cottage he lived with the birds. Ruskin Bond stayed in the cottage more than eight or nine years, which was owned by Miss Mackenzie. Ruskin Bond describes the place; Ruskin first saw the cottage in late spring, the surrounding of the forest in its prime with blossoms and fruits. The oak leaves are a pale green, the maple leaves red and gold and bronze. Ruskin mentions "The Garhwali call it the Butterfly Tree" (55) the maple wood cottage helps Ruskin Bond a lot more to produce lyric poetry in the summer days, because the window provides a romantic view to Ruskin Bond. Ruskin Bond moved to Delhi, because of his work, there he missed the hills, so he soon returned to the hilly area, "I went away at times, but returned as soon as possible. Once you have lived with mountains, there is no escape. You belong to them" (57) Ruskin Bond explores how he is attached with nature.

Through the short stories of Ruskin Bond, one can easily identify Ruskin's life. Because his works portrays his own psychological perspective, he also writes many of his short stories in the semi autobiographical tone. In the short story "Growing up with Trees" Ruskin Bond recalls his childhood days in Dehra. He writes about the beauty of the place where he had been growing up since childhood.

Dehradun was place for trees, and grandfather's house was surrounded by several kinds-peepul, neem, mango, jackfruit and papaya. There was also an ancient banyan tree. I grew up amongst these trees, and some of them, planted by grandfather, grew with me. (88)

Dehra is a place filled with nature where Ruskin Bond has grown, that provokes a kind of intimacy with nature and trees. The narrator had grown with the trees and enjoyed his play time with trees. When Ruskin Bond was a boy, he had an interest towards two types of trees: those that were good to climb and those that provided fruit. Ruskin Bond in his childhood spent his time with the jackfruit tree and the banyan tree, which is older than the house, older than his grandparents, and as a comic – book, while playing in the trees. Ruskin Bond while playing with trees, he identified himself as a comic hero. Debarati Dasgupta published an online article titled Ruskin Bond's Dehradun. That traces the place Dehra through The writings of Ruskin Bond. Dehradun is situated between the Himalayas and the shivalik range. There is no other place like Dehradun. Dehradun is a beautiful place surrounded by nature. India's beloved author Ruskin Bond made Dehradun as his home and captured its beauty through his works. Dasgupta mentioned Ruskin Bond has vividly described the smells, sights, sounds and lives of the people living in the Dehradun valley through his works. *Our Trees Still Grow In Dehra* is a collection of fourteen semi autobiographical stories, bringing out Ruskin Bond's Dehra life from his childhood. Through that work he introduced his family, friends and various people. *A Town called Dehra* paints the most vivid picture of Dehradun, which is ultimately oriented with trees and animals. *Roads To Mussoorie* another delightful collection of stories that describes Ruskin Bond's journey between Dehra and Mussoorie, that is the part of Ruskin Bond's day-to-day life. Ruskin Bond pictures the hills on the way. *Rusty, The Boy From The Hills*, describes Rusty's adventures. Through the character, Rusty Ruskin portrays his own teenage adventures with pet python and garden ghost at his grandparents Dehradun home in pre independence India. (Dasgupta, 2021) The following lines from his short story explores Ruskin Bond's identity with trees in his childhood days

I could read in it, too, propped up against the bole of the tree, with Treasure Island or the jungle books or comics like wizard or hot spur which, unlike the forbidden superman and others unlike the forbidden superman and others like him, were full of clean – cut schoolboy heroes. (89)

Shovan Dhibar (2017) in a research paper "Realism And Utopia In The Romantic Picture Of The Himalayan Foothills In The Select Works Of Ruskin Bond" examines Ruskin Bond's view of nature and simple common people of the Himalayan mountains. That compares Ruskin Bond's view of nature with Wordsworth's writing of Nature. Ruskin Bond develops such a truthful and majestic picture of the Himalayan foothills by describing Dehradun, Mussoorie, Shimla and its surroundings, which is easily identified with Ruskin Bond. Ruskin Bond in his works portrays his love and affection for nature towards hills, trees and its various types of animals. The life of people who live in the Himalayan foothills is adventurous because they face the beauty and terrible side

of nature. Ruskin Bond identifies himself with nature; his works mostly portray the relationship between man and trees.

Ruskin Bond gives minute detailed pictures of colourful and genuine feelings for the natural world through his works that have a Wordsworth's quality. Dhibar examines *All Creatures Great and Small*, a wonderful story by Ruskin Bond with a great depiction of nature as a great example for romanticism of the author. The action took place in two cities: Dehra and Saharanpur. The narrator is a boy who lives in Dehra with his grandfather. The characters grow with kind of intimacy with nature like tortoise, python and others. The grandfather brings new animals to his house because the animals lost their house because of deforestation. Human beings are responsible for this. The critic points out how Ruskin Bond wants to open up our mind so that our conscience will wake up and we start to respect forest animals and other major components of the earth. In *Coming Home to Dehra* Ruskin Bond portrays the narrator as a young boy who became alienated; second marriage is also the theme in the short story. The author portrays nature in his unique romantic way. Ruskin Bond's works continually seek the utopian world through romantic nature and real world of man. (Dhibar, 2017)

Every child thinks of themselves as a hero in many ways which affects them. The above line mentioned Ruskin Bond also thinks himself as a hero who is attached with nature. Birds, insects, and squirrels made sweet music during the rainy season to express their joy at the end of the hot season and the cool, refreshing relief of the rains, "At the height of the monsoon, the banyan tree was like an orchestra – pit with the musicians constantly turning up"(90). As a small boy Ruskin Bond also had the intent to play music through flute but whenever he played the flute the birds and insects became silent.

Ruskin Bond maintains a relationship with nature that could be known by his writings. "The Trees are My Brothers" is an exploration of Ruskin Bond's view about the trees. During his childhood days he spent his most of the time with trees mainly with jack fruit trees which are easy to climb up and provided delicious fruit, guava, litchi trees, lemons, grapefruits and mango trees but they were hard to climb. Ruskin Bond spent more time on trees and considered that to be his brother.

'Why do you spend so much time in trees' complained my grandmother 'Why not do something useful for a change?' 'The trees are my brother', I would say, I like to play with them,' and I still think of them as my brothers, although I can no longer climb trees or play in them. But I still think of them as human being processed of individuality and charm. (92)

These lines explore Ruskin Bond maintaining relationships with trees like brothers. So he spends most of his time with trees and playing with them. Ruskin Bond compares trees with human beings, because they have individuality, like humans, they grow from seed and they are not like each other, they develop branches as their arms and leaves like hairs. Humans give birth to children; trees give birth to fruits and flowers. They provide shelter, protection and food to all creatures of the world.

Ruskin states that those who are from the villages have known the value of the land, so many of them joined in Indian army. He wants to protect the land not only from the intruders but also those who change the agreed field into a concrete jungle. He advised his friend, who just like other people settled in the smart city, he mentioned that cities are no smarter, so turn toward the root of your life in the smart villages. Because the village people are maintain relationships with nature.

The Trees of Dehra is a book that depicts trees. Ruskin Bond in each story captures various kinds of trees which he had experienced throughout his life. Where other writers write about individual characters, Ruskin Bond writes about trees, in *The Trees of Dehra*, trees are the protagonists. Ruskin Bond shares his experience and feeling towards the trees, giving a human touch to the trees. Ruskin Bond glorifies nature by the description of trees that not only pictures its beauty but also the use of each tree. Ruskin Bond under each short story in the collection *The Trees of Dehra* elaborately discusses trees. Each short story gives a description about forests, mountains, trees and its beauty. Ruskin Bond is a great observer of nature; he describes "the seed, the stem, the leaves, and the fruit! Can there be a great miracle?" (7). that shows Ruskin Bond watching how a plant grows from a seed.

Ruskin Bond writes about nature in a simple and witty manner; he does not use any personification. His simple and direct language in short stories that is easy to understand. In "The Willow" Ruskin Bond gives information about the willow tree and its usage. "The next time your favourite cricket player smashing sixes all over the field; spare a thought for the bat that does the job for him. The best cricket bats are made from the timber of the willow tree"(9). The willow tree easily grows up in India's temperate climate; it mostly grows in the streams, gardens and roadside avenues. Artists loved to depict the willow in their painting because of its attractive romantic landscape. This graceful tree bare in winter, has pleasant appearance with leaves in the spring. Then Ruskin says that "Artificial limbs are made from the wood of the willow. A tree that is both useful and

attractive, not just the 'weeping willow' of legend" (9). Then Ruskin Bond further describes the livestock and the pleasant environment around the willow as read in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*.

Ruskin Bond captures the very minute details of nature, because of his observations and lifestyle which is part of nature. Ruskin Bond not only observes the trees, he also observes the small incidents and each livestock around the trees and captures it by his wordings. "Music in the Trees" is a great example to know about Ruskin Bond's observation and description of trees and the insects. In a detailed manner Ruskin portrays the music made by the cicadas, crickets, katydids and grasshoppers in the rainy season, which sit in the trees and produce sweet music. Cicadas and crickets are great musicians. Greeks know much about cicadas and they use cicada's music to sing, they choose only males because females are dumb, so Greek poets exclaim, "Happy are the cicadas, for they have voiceless wives" (10). Ruskin Bond changed the line "pity the female cicadas, for they have singing husbands" (11). The cicada's song is a mysterious music. The cicadas sing to attract the opposite sex or it may sing in happiness. The crickets, grasshoppers, and katydids also make pleasant music in the trees, which is also practiced by humans.

In "Whispering Pines", Ruskin Bond describes his favourite pine tree which is chir pine, which grows in rocky places in Pari Tibba, on the hill facing Landour. The pine whispers in the afternoon breeze, it helps Ruskin Bond to write poems in his school days. Ruskin Bond identifies that nature helps him to write poetry from his childhood. So he spent most of his time with nature. Ruskin Bond's writings acknowledged that his writings were influenced by nature. Then Ruskin Bond describes the different variety of pines,

The pine is not as tall or as durable as a deodar, but it comes in several varieties –there's the blue pine and the khasi pine and the long – leaved chir pine, and don't forget the chilgoza pine, which grows at higher attitudes and gives us those delicious and notorious chilgozas! (23)

These lines provide an interesting fact that the pine trees are not tall and strong as deodar trees, but there are many different varieties in the pine trees. This brings out the fact that Ruskin Bond closely watches every tree.

In *the Coconut Tree* Ruskin Bond tries to find out the origin of the coconut tree, through mythical story and botanical research, "Though it cannot be proved that the coconut first originated in India, there is no doubt that this tree has been with us since earliest times" (50). Ruskin Bond mentioned that in myths of India Ramayana and Mahabharata as well as ancient Tamil literature describes the coconut tree. Many country people intensify themselves as the origin for coconut trees. Marco polo and Arabs called coconut trees as Indian nuts; Hindus think that it is the Kalpaka Vriksha, or tree of heaven. Then Ruskin explains the use of coconut tree, like its leaf ribs are used to make broomstick and from it we made jaggery, coconut oil and coir fibre. "Several other palms are well – known in India – the tall, slim betel -nut palm; the shaggy wild date palm; and the Palmyra palm, on whose strong leaves the ancient scriptures were written" (51). These lines indicate that India has many varieties of palm trees. That provides a vast range of things to human usage. Because in India especially South India the people highly use every part of a Palm tree, each part is useful and it provides jobs to many people.

Ruskin Bond describes Oak trees in "The Friendly Oak". Oak trees are always friends for birds, insects and beasts because it provides food and shelter. Oak trees like the company of other oaks but each tree like the company of other oaks but each tree has its individuality. The Banj Oak grows in the 5000ft to 7000ft height in the western Himalayas. The Ruskin compares the Himalayan oaks with famous England and Europe oaks, "The mighty oak is England's noblest tree. The Romans made the crown of oak leaves" (53). The people of Celt worshipped the oak.

"When the chestnuts fall" is a description about a chestnut tree. Ruskin Bond mentions chestnut as handsome trees. In the April month chestnut trees produce new leaves and pink blossoms. In October it gives its nut which changes from green to brown. When the nuts fall, monkeys spoil them. Then Ruskin Bond remembers about his childhood days while he was collecting chestnuts and playing games with friends. Still, Ruskin Bond collects chestnuts for pleasure. And Ruskin indicates to his readers to plant a chestnut tree, "plant a chestnut whole, and in the coming spring you will have the pleasure of seeing a young tree sprung up (59)."

In "The Rhododendrons" Ruskin shares his feelings about the rhododendron because it gives feast to our eyes with pleasant looking blossoms. And Dalhousie (Mussoorie), hill is blessed with Rhododendrons, the people, who belong to the hill made wine from it. Small boys find it difficult to pronounce "Rhododendrons". The tree gives different varieties of flowers in colour like yellow, white and purple found in 8000 ft higher Himachal, Kumaon, Garhwal and Kashmir valleys. Then Ruskin explains Rhododendron came from Greek to English: Rhodo meaning rose and Dendron means tree simply call it the rose tree.

"The Sal" is a description about the sal tree and its usage. Sal likes the company of others, when it grows lonely it becomes sad. The Sal tree's timber is used in buildings and railway sleepers. Department of forest saved the Sal forest. Buddha was born and attained Nirvana under the Sal tree. Ruskin Bond indicates Rudyard Kipling used the Sal tree most in his 'Jungle Book' whenever Ruskin Bond crossed the Sal forest, he visualised the jungle book character.

India is a land fully blessed with natural resources. In "Among the Mountain Forests", Ruskin Bond narrates about the mountains and forests in India. In the Himalayan hills various forests like, Sal forest, Oak forest, Rhododendron forests are there which gives pleasure to the human soul. Ruskin Bond briefly explains about the forest's beauty and the use of the forest. The mountain forests with its blossoms give a pleasant look.

Trees play an important role in India not only in the ecological context but also in the religious beliefs; Because Indian myths and legends portray the life of nature. And many people worshipped trees as a god. In the *Friendly Banyan* Ruskin Bond expresses his observation about the banyan tree. At first, he narrates a poem about the banyan tree.

It's the hour of cow dust.
A slanting sunbeam strikes
Through the gathering mist
And turns the dust to gold.
The grazing cattle stream home.
The wading egrets seek shelter.
And in the over – arching banyan tree
The mynas squabble, the squirrels play
The fruit – bats come to life;
And then the sun sinks in the west,
And in the friendly banyan tree there's rest. (103)

Ruskin Bond mentions that he wrote this verse a few minutes before, while he thought about the majestic banyan tree. Banyan trees can spread over a vast space if humans allow the tree. Ruskin Bond compares the Aerial roots of the banyan tree with the temple pillars because it supports the tree.

In this short story "Gentle shade by Day" Ruskin Bond briefly describes the shades of the trees in summer days because those who do not have the air conditioner in their house know well the importance of the shades of the trees.

Those who have spent time in non air conditioned parts of India will remember with gratitude those gracious trees that provide shade and shelter during the summer months - the banyan, peepul, mango, neem and others. (104)

The shades of each kind of tree have its unique speciality. In this part Ruskin Bond explains about the shades of neem, tamarind, peepul, mangoes and banyan. Ruskin Bond indicates that our ancestors have the knowledge about trees so they made their lifestyle that is based on the nature sources

On this pleasant note I end this tribute, only adding that shade-giving trees

Symbolise the harmony between man and nature and that our ancestors in their devotion to trees and reverence for them, clearly showed that they knew what was good for them. (106)

Ruskin Bond explores the beauty of nature in his writings. Each story gives a detailed description about a tree, Ruskin Bond writes stories from his own surroundings and observation. Ruskin Bond's description of trees shows he is a great observer of nature. *The Trees of Dehra* short stories are descriptions about trees and nature rather than portraying a story.

Conclusion:

This research paper of "Ruskin Bond's Relationship with Nature and Description of Nature", points out Ruskin Bond's relationship with nature through the selected short stories in *The Trees of Dehra*. Ruskin Bond maintained some kind of relationship with nature; he portrays it through his short stories. Many of Ruskin Bond's short stories are written in autobiographical or semi-autobiographical tone because he portrays himself through the short stories. Ruskin Bond expresses his childhood days with trees in "The Jackfruit Tree", "Growing up with Trees" and "The Trees are my Brothers". In these stories Ruskin Bond maintains relationships with trees like one who has a relationship with humans. Ruskin Bond acknowledged that he got many materials for his writings through nature in "The Cottage called Maplewood". Ruskin Bond not only describes his own relationship with nature but also writes about other humans' relationship with nature from his

observation. This research also highlights Ruskin Bond's description of nature. Through Ruskin Bond's writings we can know that Ruskin Bond is a great observer of nature, he not only picturises the beauty of nature but also the lives around it like all creatures. "Music in the Trees" is a great example for his observation, in it he picturises every small creature and its activities in the monsoon season. In the trees of Dehra each story carries a description about a tree and its usage in detailed manner. Ruskin Bond writes about the Himalayan hilly area, where he has been living for many years.

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