

## LITERARY ECHOES ON HUMAN-ANIMAL COEXISTENCE IN THE WORKS OF RUSKIN BOND: AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

*For centuries, humans and animals lived in harmony, sharing resources and depending on nature for survival. Over time, rapid industrialization, urban growth, and deforestation have disturbed this balance, forcing animals out of their natural habitats and creating frequent conflicts with people. These issues are strongly felt in the Himalayan states, where forests and wildlife reserves border human settlements. Ruskin Bond's stories capture this changing relationship with honesty and sensitivity. His writings portray both the quiet beauty of coexistence and the struggles that arise when human activity disrupts the natural order, reminding us of the urgent need to live in balance with our environment. Set in the Himalayan foothills, Bond's works reveal a world where people and animals share daily life, from fields and orchards to forests and rivers. This study looks at his writings through an ecological perspective, showing how his simple storytelling carries deep messages of compassion, interdependence, and respect for nature. By highlighting traditional wisdom and everyday acts of kindness toward animals, Bond's stories offer valuable insights for present-day debates on conservation and sustainable living. His vision suggests that protecting forests and wildlife is not just a duty of policies or governments, but a shared responsibility rooted in human values and culture.*

### **Keywords**

*Human-animal conflict, affinity with nature, coexistence, environmental degradation, wildlife protection, ecological conservation*

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Across landscapes shaped by time and tradition, human life has always been interwoven with the rhythms of the natural world. From the quiet presence of animals on village paths to the seasonal patterns of birds and flowers, these interactions form a shared fabric of existence. Such harmony is not simply an accident of proximity but a result of mutual adaptation and respect. Coexistence is when two or more people, animals, or things live or exist in the same place without fighting or harming each other. It means sharing the same space or environment while respecting each other's presence. In nature, people, animals, birds, and all living things live on the same Earth. If we don't learn to live together peacefully, there will be fights, loss of life, and harm to the environment. Coexistence helps stop these problems and teaches us to respect each other's space and needs. In forests and nearby villages, it is very important for people and animals to live together peacefully. When forests are cut down, animals lose their homes and come into human areas. This can cause problems like crop damage or animal attacks. These problems can be avoided if we protect their homes and respect their space. Coexistence is not just about living—it is also about being kind, understanding others, and staying in balance. It helps create a world where people and animals are safe and live without fear.

Ruskin Bond's stories are known for their warmth, simple style, and clear pictures of life in the small towns and villages of the Himalayas. Animals, both wild and domestic, often appear at the center of his writings, showing a natural bond between people and the environment. His works do not just create a feeling of nostalgia but also bring attention to real challenges such as the loss of forests, the spread of human settlements, and the changes in animal behaviour. Through his short stories, essays, and novels, Bond shows his deep love for the Himalayan forests and wildlife. He describes the beauty of nature but also points to the dangers it faces today. His writings remind us that humans and animals share the same space and must live together with care and respect. In a time when Uttarakhand is facing serious issues like deforestation and rising human-animal conflict, his stories act as gentle warnings and valuable lessons. They highlight the need to conserve nature and offer insights that are still relevant for protecting the environment in the present day.

This research applies close reading alongside eco-criticism and animal studies to explore how Ruskin Bond portrays the bond between people and animals. Eco-criticism, in simple terms, is the study of literature with a focus on nature and the environment, seeing them as central to the story rather than just a setting. It examines how humans interact with the natural world and what these interactions mean. In Bond's stories, this approach shows how the hills, forests, rivers, and animals are woven into daily life, reflecting mutual reliance and shared existence. Animal

studies complement this by looking at the individuality, behaviour, and significance of animal characters. By using these perspectives, this paper analyses selected stories that highlight human–animal encounters, bringing out themes of compassion, shared living spaces, and moral responsibility. Together, these theories provide a clearer understanding of how Bond’s writing promotes a thoughtful and balanced way of living with the natural world.

Building on these frameworks, Bond’s narratives present animals not as ornamental figures but as integral participants in the shared environment. His stories frequently portray everyday interactions such as feeding a stray, observing a bird’s nest, or encountering a wild animal as moments that blur the boundaries between human and non-human lives. These depictions highlight the interdependence of species and draw attention to the ethical responsibility of humans toward other living beings. By granting animals individuality and agency, Bond challenges anthropocentric attitudes that separate humans from nature. Instead, his works propose a model of coexistence grounded in empathy, reciprocity, and respect for ecological balance. Read through eco-critical and animal studies perspectives, his writing illustrates how literature can function as a medium for environmental awareness and moral reflection.

In story *The Leopard* published in the collection *The Room of Many Colours*, Ruskin Bond narrates a poignant encounter between a leopard and a group of hunters. The leopard lives quietly in the forest, avoiding conflict and showing no intent to harm humans. Bond portrays the animal’s silent trust in human beings, a trust that is tragically shattered when a group of ruthless hunters enters its territory. Motivated by greed, they kill the leopard for profit, selling its skin in distant cities. Through this account, the author exposes the cruelty of such acts and sheds light on the illegal trade in leopard skins, highlighting the moral and environmental consequences of exploiting wildlife.

Leopard skin, they told me, were selling in Delhi at over 1,000 rupees each. Of course there was a ban on the export of skins, but they gave me understand that there were ways and means...shouting and beating drums, were the hunters. They had a long bamboo pole across their shoulders; and slung from the pole, feet up, head down, was the lifeless body of the leopard, shot in the neck and the head...It was very silent, almost as though the birds and animals knew that their trust had been violated. (Bond 172-75).

In the present context, many human activities are harming nature and disturbing the balance between people and wildlife. This makes it important to build a relationship based on respect, safety, and care for all living beings. Ruskin Bond’s

stories often highlight this idea, showing the beauty of living in harmony with animals as well as the damage caused when this harmony is broken. In *The Leopard*, Bond tells the story of a leopard that lives quietly in the forest, never intending to harm people. Its trust in humans is destroyed when a group of hunters, driven by greed, kill it to sell its skin in faraway markets. The silence that follows in the forest, as though the birds and animals are mourning, reflects the deep loss and broken trust between humans and nature. Through such stories, Bond reminds us that true coexistence depends not only on laws but also on our moral duty and cultural memory of living peacefully with the natural world.

In *A Tiger in the House*, Ruskin Bond tells the story of a tiger cub named Timothy who is raised by a human family. At first, Timothy is friendly and behaves like a pet. The family loves him and takes care of him like one of their own. But as Timothy grows older, he starts to show his wild nature. The family realizes that no matter how much they love him, he is still a wild animal. So, they decide to send him to the zoo. When a family member later goes to the zoo, he believes he has found Timothy once again. Later on, he learns that the tiger is not Timothy after spending some time with it. This reveals how animals can get cut off from both the natural world and the human world.

A recurring theme in Ruskin Bond's works is the environmental damage caused by human development. In *Death of the Trees* (from *All Time Favourite Nature Stories*), he reflects on how road construction and deforestation erode the scenic charm of the hills and disrupt local life. Bond mourns the loss of trees and the silence that follows, depicting urban expansion as a force that fractures the bond between humans, wildlife, and nature. He warns that the destruction of forests not only harms biodiversity but also heightens human-animal conflicts, a growing concern in present-day Uttarakhand. Through his narratives, Bond advocates for forest preservation and sustainable living, reminding readers of the mutual dependence between people and animals and the need for harmonious coexistence.

The explosions that continually shatter the silence of the mountains—as thousand-year-old rocks are dynamited—have frightened away all but the most intrepid of birds and animals. Even the bold langoors haven't shown their faces for over a fortnight. (Bond 177)

In *Little World of Mud* (from *All Time Favourite Nature Stories*), Ruskin Bond uses the characters of Grandfather and the boy Rakesh to express his concern for the rights of birds, animals, and other living creatures. Through their simple conversations on various topics, Bond gently conveys the importance of compassion and responsibility toward nature. "It is also important that we respect them," said

Grandfather. ‘We must acknowledge their rights in the earth. Everyone, birds and animals are finding it more difficult to survive because we are destroying their forests. They have to keep moving as the trees disappear’ (Bond 196). Similarly, in *The Tree Lover* (from *All Time Favourite Nature Stories*), he highlights the need to protect the natural habitats of birds and animals, stressing the role of tree planting in ensuring their survival. These narratives reflect Bond’s belief that safeguarding wildlife and promoting plantations are essential for maintaining ecological balance and securing a healthy future for all living beings.

‘We’re not planting for people only,’ said Grandfather. ‘We’re planting for the forest—and for the birds and animals who live here and need more food and shelter.’ He told me how men, and not only birds and animals, needed trees—for keeping the desert away, for attracting rain, for preventing the banks of rivers from being washed away, and for wild plants and grasses to grow beneath...But people are cutting down the trees without replacing them. For every tree that’s felled, we must plant two. Otherwise, one day there’ll be no forests at all, and the world will become one vast desert. (Bond 201-203).

An important aspect of Ruskin Bond’s writing is his deep respect for traditional wisdom and local narratives about nature. In many of his stories, characters embody values passed down through generations, teaching harmonious coexistence with wildlife and the environment. For instance, in *The Tiger in the House*, Grandfather’s gentle care for Timothy the tiger reflects the older belief systems in rural India, where wild animals were treated with familiarity and respect. Similarly, *The Cherry Tree* illustrates the patience and commitment involved in nurturing plants, a lesson often rooted in cultural traditions. In *Panther’s Moon*, Bond depicts the villagers’ cautious yet respectful attitude towards a wild panther, highlighting the need to understand animal behaviour rather than destroy it. *The Leopard* captures the fading trust between humans and wildlife when commercial greed replaces traditional reverence. Likewise, *Dust on the Mountain* contrasts the sustainable livelihoods of the past with the ecological damage brought by modern exploitation. Through these works, Bond demonstrates that indigenous knowledge and cultural values are vital for modern conservation efforts, as they promote a balanced and respectful relationship between humans and the natural world.

The stories of Ruskin Bond depict a way of life where humans and animals coexist with harmony, compassion, and responsibility. He encourages readers to view animals not as outsiders or threats, but as fellow residents of the same shared home. This perspective promotes a way of thinking that values respect and peaceful living rather than control or exploitation. Bond often draws from his personal

experiences in the Himalayan landscape, whether observing birds, noticing snakes, or encountering bears and leopards, to highlight the closeness between people and wildlife. His writings remind us that animals are not merely dangers to be feared or ornaments to be admired. They are an integral part of the environment, just as humans are. By showing how both people and animals depend on one another and must share the same spaces with care, Bond emphasizes that coexistence is not only possible but also essential for maintaining ecological balance.

In several of his nature-centred tales, Ruskin Bond illustrates how everyday encounters with animals foster respect, understanding, and a sense of coexistence. In *The Tunnel*, the railway watchman and a leopard share the same path without conflict, showing that tolerance can replace fear. *Adventures in a Banyan Tree* portrays a boy's patient observation of birds, squirrels, and even a snake, revealing how close contact with wildlife can nurture curiosity and empathy. In *Animals in the House*, Bond describes a household where creatures such as a python, a hornbill, and a mongoose live alongside humans, dissolving the barrier between domestic and wild spaces. Narrated in the first person, the story reflects a boy's deep bond with his animal companions:

Instead of having brothers and sisters to grow up with in India, I had as my companions an odd assortment of pets, which included a monkey, a tortoise, a python and a Great Indian Hornbill. The person responsible for all this wildlife in the home was my grandfather. As the house was his own, my grandmother could not prevent him from keeping a large variety of pets, though she could certainly voice her objections. (Bond 1)

Together, these narratives offer a vision of human–animal relationships rooted in affection, mutual respect, and easy companionship, reflecting Bond's enduring message that living in harmony with nature is not only possible but essential for a balanced and compassionate world.

### **Conclusion**

Ruskin Bond's stories show a deep understanding of the close connection between people and nature in the Himalayas. By highlighting simple traditions such as protecting forests, sharing water sources, and respecting wildlife, he presents sustainability as a part of daily life rather than just a set of rules. His gentle descriptions of changing seasons, disappearing forests, and animal habits remind readers of the need to value and protect what still remains. The kindness his characters show to animals and their efforts to adjust their lives around nature reveal a way of living where respect and care create balance between humans and the environment.

At the same time, Bond's writings remain highly relevant to present-day Uttarakhand, where issues such as deforestation, ecological damage, and rising human–animal conflict are urgent concerns. His works suggest that peaceful coexistence requires both compassion and adaptation, offering lessons not only for individuals but also for communities, researchers, and policymakers. By blending personal memories with ecological insights, Bond provides more than stories; he offers guidance and hope for a future where people and nature can continue to live together in harmony.

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