

**ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS FOSTERED IN RUSKIN BOND'S *DUST ON THE MOUNTAIN***

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**ABSTRACT**

The main function of literature, according to Plato and many other classical writers, is to teach and then delight. They emphasized the importance of the moral in literature. It should teach and then to transform individuals for the betterment of the self and for the society. The term 'Environmental Ethics' comes under Eco criticism. It lays emphasis on the values that human beings should follow to protect the environment and the organisms that live in it. Modern writers, understanding the sad plight of the degradation of environment, writes about the ethical practices that human beings should follow to preserve and protect the environment. This paper focuses on the ethical values that human beings need to follow and that which is emphasized by Ruskin Bond in his short story *Dust on the Mountain*. Ruskin Bond wants the readers to get the awareness of environment and wants them to be ethical in matters related to using the natural resources.

**Key Words:** Ecology, environmental ethics, eco criticism, depletion, preservation

Literature reflects the issues and concerns of the contemporary society. It is this spirit of concern and its reflection in literature that has offered to the world, a special field called "Ecocriticism". Environmental concerns and the writings related them fill the literature of the globe today. Eco criticism is the study literature and ecology from an interdisciplinary point of view. Richard Kerridge says: "Eco criticism is literary and cultural criticism from an environmentalist viewpoint. Texts are evaluated in terms of their environmental implications. Eco critics analyse the history of concepts such as 'nature', in an attempt to understand the cultural ecological crisis (Waugh, Literary Theory 530)

Cheryll Glotfelty, the founder of the American Association for Literature & Environment (ASLE), describes Eco criticism as: "While in most literary theory 'the world' is synonymous with society – the social sphere – Eco criticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere."(1)

Eco critics investigate and lay emphasis on ecological values. Environmental ethics is a branch of ethical thought that focuses on the relationship between humans and their natural environment. It is a holistic approach to understanding and evaluating human beings moral obligations to protect and preserve the environment.

Environmental ethics and religion are closely related. Religions encourage human beings to respect fellow human beings and the environment and protect the environment around. Even the special purpose of God in creating human beings is to protect the earth and all that lives in it. In

the book of Genesis, in the *Holy Bible*, Chapter 1, Verse 26, we read, Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." This suggests that humans have a special relationship with nature and should care for and protect it. Further in Genesis.2.15, we find, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."

Environmental ethics can be broadly divided into three types. The first one is Libertarian Extension. According to this type of environmental ethics, an individual has the right to do whatever he/she wants to do with the environment and its resources. The second type of environmental ethics is Ecological Extension. According to this type human beings are having the responsibility to preserve the natural environment and its resources in order to maintain the balance and health of the ecosystem. The third type of environmental ethics is Conservation Ethics. It emphasizes that the natural resources should be preserved for future generations by ensuring that current resources are not depleted or damaged beyond repair. This concept encourages individuals to use natural resources responsibly and judiciously so there will be enough for future generations.

The present paper is a study on Ruskin Bond's *Dust on the Mountain* and highlights the importance of environmental ethics such as:

- \* Protecting the environment, species, and resources.
- \*Promoting sustainable practices and encourages people to be aware of the impact their actions have on the environment.
- \*Preserving the natural environment.
- \* Understanding the intrinsic value of nature.
- \*Encouraging individuals to think beyond our immediate needs and consider the long-term implications of our actions.
- \*Realizing the responsibility of human beings to protect the environment.

Ruskin Bond is one of the most significant Indian writers in English, whose emphasis is on the environment in his writings. He is a passionate lover of nature. Like the romantic writers, Ruskin Bond's works mainly focus on nature and ecology. He lives in Mussoorie, at the foothills of the Himalaya, a place that attracts everybody with its scenic beauty with its tall trees, mountain ranges, streams flowing like silver, and amazing wealth of natural resources. Bond is much worried about the destruction of the natural environment that happen in the name of development. His deep concern for nature is revealed through the characters of his short stories. Human beings exploit nature in the name of urbanization and modernization, without knowing the price that human beings should pay for their acts of deforestation and depletion of natural resources.

Bisnu, the hero of the story, *Dust on the Mountains*, is a young boy who lives with his younger sister and mother in a small village of Tehri Garhwal. The village is in the foot hills Himalayan mountain ranges surrounded by oak, deodar, maple, pine and apricot trees:

" Thousands of Himalayan trees were perishing in the flames. Oaks, deodars, maples, pines-trees that had taken hundreds of years to grow. And now a fire started carelessly by some woodcutters

had been of the dry grass and a strong breeze. There was no one to put it out. It would take to die down.”(Mountain 3)

Bisnu, the breadwinner of the family, worked hard on his farmland to provide for his family. The farmers of his place depend on monsoonal rainfall. On a particular year, the monsoon failed and the mountains received scanty rainfall and bare minimum snowfall. So, the orchards of fruits and farming in the field got minimum yield. The streams and rivers that descend from the peaks are shallow and dry, so the people of the village faced severe problems as depend only on their farm work. They struggled hard for their survival. So Bisnu decided to go to the city to provide for his mother and sister.

Though his family did not want to be separated from him, he went to Mussoorie to seek his fortunes. Summer is a happy time in Mussoorie and so the place is full of tourists from various places. Bisnu tried for a job there. After many attempts he got a job as a tea seller in a cinema hall in the city. There Bisnu met two other boys, Chittru and Bali. He became friendly with them and they all work together as per the order of the owner. However Chittru and Bisnu became close friends as they sleep in the cool corridor of the cinema hall at night. Bisnu enjoyed his work and admired the people who come to the cinema hall.

As the cinema hall was closed for winter, Bisnu was forced to search for a new job. Bali moved to Delhi for work while Chittru and Bisnu went to a mine site with the hope of getting work. There the contractor kept Chittru for the work but rejected Bisnu on account of underage. Pritam, a Sikh truck owner, accepted Bisnu as a cleaner on his truck, and promised to give him a good salary. Bisnu received a good salary from him and they became good friends. They work for the mine site where deforestation and blasting of mountains are common for generating lime powder. However Bisnu feels saddened at the sight of mountains losing their green shine and becoming dusty like plain areas. When they saw the mountain, they found that the top of it was missing, blasted away by dynamite to enable quarries to get at the rich strata of limestone rock below the surface. Bisnu felt for the trees that were cut down and the land that has been raided of its natural beauty as it is stripped of its treasures for human benefit. The quarry industry makes air, water and sound polluted.

Bond's respect for the intrinsic value of nature is clearly revealed in the story. He feels that nature should not be treated as a commodity or resource to be exploited and discarded. Out of his concern to protect the environment he writes:

“They were nearing the quarries when they saw clouds of limestone dust hanging in the air. The dust hid the next mountain from view. When they did see the mountain, they found that the top of it was missing- blasted away by dynamite to enable the quarries to get at the rich strata of limestone rock below the surface. The skeletons of a few trees remained on the lower slopes. Almost everything had gone- grass, flowers, shrubs, birds, butterflies, grasshoppers, ladybirds. A rock lizard popped its head out of a crevice to look at the intruders. Then, like some prehistoric survivor, it scuttled back into its underground shelter.”(Mountain 32)

The flora and fauna of the region are destroyed. At the blast of the dynamite, rocks and trees are thrown under.

One day in an attempt to save a mule being crushed under the truck, the truck driven by Pritam and Bisnu with it, toppled and started to roll down into a valley but suddenly it was stopped by a strong Oak tree. Bisnu and other labourers managed to escape the accident but Pritam was brutally wounded. In the hospital Bisnu told that if there was no tree, they would have died by falling in the valley.

Bond stresses the vital principal of environmental ethic, the interdependence of species and ecosystems: Humans depend on nature and natural systems. Had it not been the Oak tree, they would not be alive. So human beings must recognize their role in preserving and protecting the environment. Pritam Singh realized the life-saving power of trees. Having approached the quarries, Bisnu was shocked watching the combustion of shrubs and small trees. The speculation of the same fate of the trees at his village frightened him Pritam Singh's accident made Bisnu and Pritam to rethink; Bisnu decided to return home and start harvesting: 'I'll work on my land. It's better to grow things on the land, than to blast thing out of it'. Thereafter Pritam decided to live with his sons and Bisnu wanted to return back to his village to take care of his family and the nature around him.

Bond emerged as an environmentalist, laments at the destruction of nature. The delicious wild strawberries, those which Chittru and his friend would eat, were destroyed. The demise of forest panicked Bisnu who is habituated with green mountains at his village and not with desert like dart. When asked about the condition of trees at his village, Bisnu, as if in a voice of protest, complains to Pritam Singh: Nobody has started blasting the hills as yet'

Ruskin Bond, through this story imparts the principles of environmental ethics that human beings should

- \*strive to use resources responsibly, with an eye to preserving ecosystems and biodiversity.
- \* feel their responsibility of actions and decisions and their consequences for the environment.
- \* strive for a just world where the rights and needs of humans, animals, and plants are respected and protected.
- \*take precautions against environmental harm.
- \* be aware of the environmental issues and the reformation needed to take right decisions to protect nature from further destruction, for the future generation.

Bond through the story *Dust on the mountain* ensures that human beings relationship with nature is optimistic.

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