

Nature as Refuge and Resistance: Eco-Spirituality in the selected works of Ruskin Bond and Phanishwar Nath Renu

Dr. Jyoti Kumari

Assistant Professor (English), Indian Institute of Handloom Technology, Chowkaghat,
Varanasi. **Email Id:** jkmgkvp23@gmail.com

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Abstract: This paper explores the intertwined ideas of refuge, resistance, and eco-spirituality in the selected works of Ruskin Bond and Phanishwar Nath Renu, focusing on how nature becomes a moral, emotional, and cultural force within their narratives. Ruskin Bond's writings particularly *Rain in the Mountains*, *A Book of Simple Living*, and stories such as *The Cherry Tree* and *A Face in the Dark* present the Himalayan landscape as a sanctuary that nurtures solitude, healing, and spiritual renewal. Bond's gentle observations reveal nature as a space of quiet resistance to the accelerating pressures of urbanization, alienation, and ecological decline. In contrast, Renu's anchalik masterpieces such as *Maila Anchal*, *Rasool Mian*, and *Panchlight* depict nature as an active participant in rural life, where rivers, fields, and seasons embody community resilience against social inequality, political neglect, and environmental disruption. Drawing on an eco-critical and comparative framework, this paper argues that while Bond's eco-spirituality centers on individual harmony with the natural world, Renu emerges through collective cultural practices and lived rural experience. Together, their works illuminate nature as both refuge and resistance, offering rich eco-spiritual insights within English and vernacular literary traditions.

Keywords: Eco-spirituality, refuge, resistance, nature writing, anchalik literature.

Introduction: In Indian literary traditions, nature is rarely a passive backdrop; instead, it emerges as a living presence imbued with spiritual, ethical, and cultural significance. Postcolonial literature, in particular, employs natural landscapes as sites of memory, resistance, and healing. In the works of Ruskin Bond and Phanishwar Nath Renu, nature functions as both refuge and resistance, offering solace amid social upheaval while challenging the alienation fostered by modernity. Eco-spirituality provides a productive framework for examining this dynamic. It recognizes the sacredness of nature and underscores humanity's moral responsibility toward the environment. By applying this lens to Bond's and Renu's selected works, this paper explores how ecological consciousness becomes an ethical and spiritual response to cultural disintegration and environmental degradation. Eco-criticism and eco-spirituality together offer a comprehensive framework for examining literary representations of nature that move beyond aesthetic appreciation toward ethical and philosophical engagement. Eco-criticism, as a critical approach, investigates the relationship between literature and the physical environment, foregrounding how texts respond to ecological concerns and environmental ethics. Ecocriticism, as defined by Cheryll Glotfelty, studies "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). Eco-spirituality extends this inquiry by foregrounding the sacred dimension of ecological relationships. In the Indian philosophical and cultural context, eco-spirituality finds deep resonance. Concepts such as *prakriti* (nature) and *dharma* (ethical duty) emphasize harmony between humans and the natural world. Rivers, forests, mountains, and animals are traditionally revered as sacred

entities, reinforcing a worldview that values coexistence over domination. This indigenous ecological consciousness informs much of Indian literature, particularly regional and rural narratives.

Main Text: When applied to literary analysis, eco-spirituality allows for an exploration of how nature functions as a source of healing, moral insight, and resistance. Literature shaped by eco-spiritual sensibilities often portrays natural spaces as sites of refuge where characters recover psychological balance and spiritual clarity. Simultaneously, such representations resist dominant paradigms of modernity that prioritize exploitation, materialism, and technological control over ecological balance.

Both Bond and Renu draw upon this indigenous ecological wisdom. Their narratives resist anthropocentric attitudes and affirm the intrinsic value of nature, presenting ecological harmony as essential to human well-being. Ruskin Bond is a renowned Indian author known for his simple, heartwarming stories and essays. He has written more than 500 short stories, essays, novels, and books for children. Some of his famous works include *The Room on the Roof*, *The Blue Umbrella*, and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. Ruskin Bond occupies a distinctive position in Indian English literature for his sustained engagement with nature as a spiritual, ethical, and restorative force. Unlike overtly political or activist environmental writing, Bond's ecological vision is subtle and deeply personal, rooted in everyday encounters with forests, mountains, rain, and wildlife. His writings articulate an eco-spiritual sensibility in which nature functions as a source of refuge, moral instruction, and quiet resistance to modern alienation and material excess.

Bond's eco-spiritual consciousness is most clearly expressed through his lifelong association with the Himalayan foothills. In *Rain in the Mountains*, Ruskin Bond presents the Himalayan landscape as a sanctuary of peace and introspection. The rhythm of rain, mist-covered hills, and forested slopes creates a meditative atmosphere that contrasts sharply with urban chaos. Bond's reflections suggest that immersion in nature fosters spiritual clarity and emotional balance (Bond, *Rain*). Nature here functions as a refuge not only from physical discomfort but also from existential anxiety. The mountains offer silence, solitude, and continuity- qualities that modern life often erodes. This portrayal aligns with eco-spiritual principles that emphasize reconnection with the natural world as a path to inner harmony.

A Book of Simple Living extends Bond's eco-spiritual vision by advocating a lifestyle rooted in mindfulness, moderation, and respect for nature. Bond's rejection of material excess is not merely ethical but spiritual, suggesting that true fulfillment arises from harmony with one's environment. The text implicitly critiques consumerism and ecological exploitation, presenting simplicity as an act of resistance. By choosing a life close to nature, Bond's persona resists the dominant narratives of progress and development that often marginalize ecological concerns.

Another work, *The Cherry Tree* uses the slow growth of a tree as a metaphor for patience, resilience, and spiritual maturation. The protagonist's emotional journey mirrors the tree's development, reinforcing the idea that nature nurtures moral growth. 'The Cherry Tree' becomes a symbol of continuity and hope, suggesting that nature offers refuge through its cyclical rhythms. This narrative underscores eco-spiritual themes of inter-connectedness and reverence for life. Unlike Bond's more serene nature narratives, *A Face in the Dark* presents the forest as a site of fear and mystery. Yet, this fear does not diminish nature's spiritual significance. Instead, it reinforces human humility before the unknown. The story suggests that true refuge lies not in domination over

nature but in respectful coexistence. The forest's darkness becomes a space of moral confrontation, reminding humans of their vulnerability and ethical responsibility.

Phanishwar Nath Renu emerges as one of the most significant voices in modern Hindi literature for his nuanced portrayal of rural life and its organic relationship with nature. Widely regarded as a pioneer of *anchalik* (regional) realism, Renu situates ecological landscapes at the center of social, cultural, and spiritual experience. His writings articulate an eco-spiritual vision in which nature is inseparable from community life, ethical values, and cultural memory. Unlike urban-centric narratives that marginalize rural ecologies, Renu's works affirm nature as a living, sustaining force that nurtures resilience and resists cultural erosion.

Phanishwar Nath Renu was one of the most influential writers of modern Hindi literature. He was born in Aurahi Hingna village of present-day Araria. He is best known for introducing Aanchalik (regional) literature, which realistically portrays rural life, local dialects, and the struggles of ordinary people. *Maila Anchal* (1954) is considered his masterpiece and one of the most important Hindi novels after *Godaan*. In this work, Renu presents rural Bihar as a living ecological system where land, people, and culture are inseparable. Fields, rivers, and seasons shape social relations and collective identity, providing stability amid political and social change (Renu, *Maila Aanchal* 110–15).

Rasool Miyan emphasizes the intimate bond between individuals and their environment. Nature preserves memory and identity, reinforcing continuity in the face of disruption (Renu, *Rasool Miyan* 63–65). In *Panchlight*, darkness and scarcity test the village community, yet survival emerges through cooperation and environmental awareness. Nature becomes a moral and communal testing ground, underscoring eco-spiritual values of interdependence (Renu, “Panchlight” 57–59).

Bond's advocacy of slow living and ecological intimacy constitutes a subtle resistance to consumerism and environmental exploitation. His works challenge dominant narratives of progress by affirming alternative values rooted in simplicity and reverence for nature. Renu's commitment to rural realism resists urban-centric literary and cultural hierarchies. By centering marginalized communities and their ecological relationships, Renu asserts the dignity of indigenous knowledge systems and environmental ethics.

While Bond's eco-spiritual vision emphasizes personal introspection and solitude, Renu foregrounds collective resilience and cultural continuity. Despite these differences, both writers converge in their portrayal of nature as sacred, sustaining, and ethically significant. Their works collectively challenge anthropocentric modernity and reaffirm ecological harmony as essential to human survival.

Conclusion: Through an eco-spiritual lens, the selected works of Ruskin Bond and Phanishwar Nath Renu reveal nature as both refuge and resistance. Their writings underscore the inseparability of ecological balance, spiritual well-being, and cultural identity. By re-centering nature as a sacred presence, these authors offer a powerful literary response to environmental degradation and modern alienation, contributing meaningfully to contemporary eco-critical discourse.

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