



# Exploitation and Extinction: An Ecocritical Exploration of Ruskin Bond's The Leopard

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## Abstract

One of the most alarming issues of today's world is exploitation and extinction. Everywhere there is scarcity of resources, unpredictable climatic variations, and unconducive atmosphere resulting in an unfriendly world. There is a drastic change in the natural and the human world due to human greed. Ruskin Bond's short story "The Leopard" explores the cause of extinction and exploitation and throws light on the relationship between man and the other species. It also brings out the repercussions of misappropriation of natural resources.

**Key Words:** Extinction, Exploitation, Misappropriation, Unconducive

Language and Landscape are inextricably interconnected and language exists as an instrument which extols the glory of the exuberant and lustrous landscape. The landscape comprises multifarious species and entities. Among the various species, man plays a pivotal role as the steward who safeguards and ensures effective functioning of the ecosystem. Man lived a harmonious life in tune with the subtleties of the landscape. Civilisation and Urbanisation distanced man from his landscape and caused an irrevocable damage to the ecosystem, endangering and jeopardising the existence of the inhabitants of the ecosystem. The impact of science and technology is greater in its magnitude as it incapacitates the earth and renders the landscape infertile. To redeem the landscape from the devastating effect of technology, man has to revive his bond with the landscape.

Among all the species, man has carved a niche for himself in the pantheon by presuming to hold prominence in the ecosystem, and bifurcated it into two dichotomous world: the human world and the natural world. The ecosystem existed as an ensemble encompassing and embracing all the species in a harmonious bond within a single ambit. As long as there was one world and integrated living, there prevailed peace and serenity. When man was driven to set his world apart from the natural world and extricate his identity from the animal kingdom, the disparity between the two worlds widened and developed into a formidable fort of separation, and there came into existence the two worlds of diversified nature, the natural and the human world. Man's disfigurement in the mask of culture triggered further estrangement between the two worlds.

The divide between the natural and the human world impels man to exploit the natural world resulting in misappropriation of resources. The ecosystem and its resources exist as the source of sustenance in equal measure to both the worlds. But it appears so that the human species celebrates its dominance by withholding and exhausting the resources which jeopardises the existence of the other species leading to their extinction. Scarcity of resources springs further from incongenial atmosphere created by technology and urbanisation. Many writers have attempted to voice these concerns in their works and one such writer is Ruskin Bond. *The Leopard*, a short story by Ruskin

Bond exposes in limelight the pathetic plight of animals, victimised and exploited to gratify human greed. It also stresses upon the consequences of human intrusion into the exuberant world of birds and trees.

*The Leopard* begins with a vivid description of the scenic beauty of a ravine which remains in the shadow most of the day and various birds and animals are attracted towards the ravine as it serves as a haven to them. The story is set in a place named Mussoorie. Ruskin Bond lives in a cottage amidst wilderness in the company of myriad birds, animals and trees. The dichotomy between the natural and the human world is hammered in the first few lines: "Few people ever passed that way. As a result, the ravine had become a little haven of wildlife, one of the few natural sanctuaries left near Mussoorie"(Bond). Birds and animals of this ravine dread the approach or presence of human beings and consider them a threat to the harmony of their existence. The ambience of the ravine is pristine and serene as it is untouched by civilisation and less trodden by human beings. The flowers and fruits are season specific as the ravine has never experienced hostile climate and unpredictable weather, "It was early April and the wild roses were flowering"(Bond). The inhabitants and visitors of the ravine are filled with awe and joy as they behold and partake the breathtaking beauty of this heavenly land. Mike Hulme is of the view that "climate change is a result of a systemic failure of humanity to live within the confines of Mother Earth" (160).

Ruskin Bond seeks the company of nature and detests his life in the city with its stifling atmosphere, experiences new strength and vigour, and feels inspired to write a novel in a set up characterised by fragrant flowers and refreshing trees, chirpy birds and animated animals who demonstrate a harmonious living respecting and upholding each other's inherent worth. The writer becomes a part of the ravine, the birds and the animals do not fear his presence in their midst as he does not intimidate them with any exploitative motives. He expresses his joy in becoming one with them "As I had not come to take anything from the jungle, the birds and animals soon grew accustomed to my face...After sometime, my approach did not disturb them"(Bond). In one of his wanderings in the forest, he even spots a sinewy orange-gold leopard but remains unruffled and assured of its cordiality to him. Ruskin Bond highlights the most significant characteristic of animal behaviour in this scene. An animal launches an attack on the other species only under two circumstances: hunger and threat to life. The behavioural pattern of animals is quite predictable than man. The fastidious nature of man determines the unpredictability of his nature and his insatiable demands grow in its magnitude to the extent of endangering the very existence of the ecosystem.

Man considers nature as an encashable entity and fails to recognise its intrinsic value. Ruskin Bond exposes the anthropocentric supremacy through a group of Shikaris who are on a vigorous hunt for a leopard: "They said they knew there was a leopard in the forest. Leopard skins...were selling in Delhi at over a thousand rupees each! Of course there was a ban on the export of skins..."(Bond). The shikaris' relentless search for the leopard with a gun alters the harmonious ambience of the ravine into a desolate region devoid of vivacity and jubilation. It drives the writer to the point of condemning and disregarding his own kind "I thought no more of men...My attitude to them was similar to the attitude of the denizens of the forest. They were men, unpredictable, and to be avoided if possible"(Bond). The abominable attitude of human species is well exemplified in these lines.

The story ends with the sad news that the shikaris succeed in their endeavour of hunting down the leopard. The writer feels guilty of tricking the leopard into a trap by his presence which misled the animal to fall a prey to the hypocrisy of the human beings. He expresses his guilt in these lines: "But did the leopard, trusting one man, make the mistake of bestowing his trust on others? Did I, by casting out all fear- my own fear, and the leopard's protective fear- leave him defenceless?"(Bond). Ruskin ends the story with a very strong note that man has betrayed nature's trust in him. He has given up on his role as a steward. As the writer remarks "I walked home through the silent forest. It was very silent, almost as though the birds and animals knew that their trust had been violated"(Bond). Through this story Ruskin Bond emphasises on the responsibility entrusted to man, that is stewardship. Instead of creating harmony in the ecosystem, man is creating fissures "mad pursuit of ruthless exploitation of nature to meet the demands of misconceived model of development has already started showing its devastating consequences" (Chandalia 109). He concludes the story with a disheartening end hoping for a transformation in man.

## Works Cited

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