

## Pedagogical Aspects of EcoGothic Elements in Ruskin Bond's Novellas

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the pedagogical aspect of the ecoGothic elements in Ruskin Bond's fiction, particularly the three novellas chosen to be highlighted: *Angry River* (Flood), *Dust on the Mountains* (Deforestation in the Mountains) and *Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright* (Wildlife Conservation). Even his poems such as "The Pool" and "Parts of Old Dehra" carry the same sombre tone. This article will be analysing these stories, mapping their Gothic tropes such as 'Burkean Grief' and 'sympathy for the devil'. In so doing, this article will be highlighting the pedagogical importance of Bond's work utilising an ecoGothic perspective married to a postcolonial Gothic pedagogical approach. The aim is to initiate a discourse around the pedagogical benefits of reading Ruskin Bond's novella from an ecoGothic perspective in order to inculcate an inter-disciplinary approach towards environment conservation. This article will mainly be using Gina Wisker for the postcolonial Gothic pedagogical framework and Thomas Nelson for his methodology of using education to combat ecological crises. The findings reveal that the conflict between humans and nature in Bond's fictions connect to a stronger underlying theme in Indian EcoGothic fiction in relation to climate change.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Gothic; EcoGothic; Gothic Pedagogies; Indian Gothic; Ecocriticism

### INTRODUCTION

This article positions the writings of Ruskin Bond into an ecoGothic context, arguing that his novellas should be incorporated into the Indian primary curriculum as a pedagogical tool utilising methods of ecoGothic analysis in order to build an awareness to nature and the climate crisis. EcoGothic methods of inquiry arise from both ecocriticism and Gothic literary analysis, exploring the ways in which the relationship between characters, nature and Gothic tropes exemplify the state of environmental and climate emergency that the world is facing. Addie C. Booth (2020) writes that the ecoGothic lies "at the intersection of ecocriticism and horror studies" (p.755). Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013) explain that the term is "predated by ecohorror" but aver that both terms are not interchangeable since ecohorror, "refers to a type of horror fiction where nature is a clear and dangerous monster", but on the other hand, the ecoGothic "indicates a method of inquiry for understanding the darker, more disturbing aspects of human relationships with nonhuman nature" (p.755). The nature of that relationship helps us understand not just the Sublime better, but to understand why Gothic can be a powerful teaching tool in order to help students understand their relationship to nature and their social responsibility in relation to climate crisis.

The second decade of the current millennium is fraught with issues ranging from political instability, to the global COVID-19 pandemic and equally urgently, climate change.

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But one issue which has recently caught the attention of the world media, owing to the work of activists such as Greta Thunberg, is that of Climate Change, Global Warming and the subsequent results in the form of New South Wales bushfires of September 2019 (Freedman, 2020). While there is a need to tackle this issue on every front, scholars such as Thomas Nelson and John A. Cassell (2012) have called for a radical revolution in the school curriculum to foster a greater awareness of climate change related issues. Nelson and Cassell (2012) stressed upon the need to 'create learning dynamics in all levels of formal education capable of destabilizing the historically engrained a priori assumptions upon which they are based, and in so doing, remove the blinders that render us incapable of appreciating the depth of the environmental catastrophe we have ourselves created' (p. 72). Although there has been a derailment of global agendas on the climate front due to the ongoing worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, it is now more important than ever to reiterate the need for climate awareness and climate education. Michelle Poland (2017) writes that the scholarship of the current age has "further highlighted the need to take seriously the instrumental role the arts and humanities have to play in uprooting dominant anthropocentric ideology implicated in the current ecosocial crisis" (p.54). She reiterates that "recent human interference is the most significant factor in ecological disturbance" and that therefore the best way to understand modern nature and to achieve a "viable theory of literary ecology" has to be interdisciplinary" (p.55). In relation to the eco-social crisis, Nelson and Cassell (2012) identify shortcomings in the education system, mainly western, that most paradigms which exist to tackle the current ecological crisis are of quantifiable nature such as carbon levels in the atmosphere, various other pollutants, the Air Quality Index, and the rise in Global temperature. It is therefore necessary to frame a narrative capable of delivering the message of instant action towards safeguarding community, and future of humanity in general. For this purpose, this article proposes the inclusion of ecoGothic fiction in teaching the values of conservation and of respecting nature, focusing in particular, on Bond's three novellas.

In 1934, Ruskin Bond was born in India. He is categorised as an Anglo-Indian author. Currently writing at the age of 85, Bond is one of the most prolific 'adolescent fiction' writers in Indian Anglophone literature. He has written over five hundred short stories, fifty novellas, countless poems and essays and continues to write till date. Bond has a particular affinity to nature. At a very young age he lost both his parents, first mother followed by father at the age of twelve. Bond found solace in nature, and considered the lineaments of nature both parental and fraternal. Although he is not the first writer to write about nature, it is significant that nature is not just a backdrop in his stories. The protagonists do not merely observe nature, they are active participants in the surroundings of the tales. On one hand these protagonists experience the nurturing and caring side of nature, with its fruit laden trees and streaming water, on the other, they also witness the destructive side when nature spews lava and take forms of flooding rivers and shaking grounds due to excessive drilling in mountains. Ultimately, these protagonists achieve a harmonically state of balance with nature, learning to live and exist within each other and to respect each other. A sub-corpus of Bond's writings are Gothic in nature, as the mountainous area Bond grew up in and still lives in are ripe with folktales and ghost stories. These cautionary tales are designed to instruct and have been a part of Indian culture since the age of 'Panchatantra' written somewhere around 200 BCE, normally attributed to Vishnu Sharma, which is a collection of animal fables. Bond's writings are mostly concerned with travelling. The narrator is hardly at home and is usually a vagrant, a traveler who comes upon unusual scenarios. A considerable amount of these 'unusual scenarios' are supernatural in nature but have not been critically considered by the scholars in detail. All the important markers of the Gothic are present in Bond's supernatural scenarios such as far-off settings; ghosts either out for vengeance or helping the protagonist in one way or another, horrific deaths, and powerful love. Bond also includes unique Indian elements in these stories.

It is due to these Indian elements that these Gothic stories of Bond are discussed in this article as a model for Indian Gothic literature.

K.T. Unais (2018) discusses the Indian female Gothic narratives in Anita Desai's writings and defines Indian Gothic as "very different from the western gothic narratives" (2018, p.274). According to Unais, Indian writers have invented their own form of Gothic, subverting Western tropes of violence and physical terror/horror, and replaced it with "old gardens and some actions" in order to "express their feelings and sufferings" (p.274). In Bond's Gothic stories, supernatural blends into the nature and enact revenge on the wrongdoers and reward the people who try to act morally. Because these moral actions are related to nature, these stories are therefore suitable to be categorised as ecoGothic, which will be the main theoretical framework for this article, but modified to reflect an ecoGothic pedagogy. EcoGothic elements within the range of creative works defined as Gothic refers to the deep connection between ecological concerns and plot in Gothic fiction. From a pedagogical perspective, this Gothic subgenre allows for a deeper appreciation of the exigencies inherent in climate catastrophes and what happens when nature is compromised. In relation to this, Catherine Lanone (2013) raises an important point that "ecoGothic narratives turn to the ghosts of the past in order to shock capitalist logic into changing while there might still be time (p.28). It is the ability to shock and perhaps course correct through literary narrative that the pedagogical value of the ecoGothic is most evident. Therefore, in this article, we argue that the ecoGothic is a powerful pedagogical tool to enable students to understand the deeper connection between humanity and nature, and how vital it is to protect nature for future generations.

In order to develop the utilising of this tool, we repurpose the pedagogical markers and approaches of the postcolonial Gothic as outlined by Wisker (2007) in her writings on the subject towards better understanding the pedagogical value of the ecoGothic, as explicated in our Literature Review. We also consulted glossaries of the Gothic edited and curated by Maria Mulvey Roberts and Douglass H. Thomson<sup>b</sup> to derive five key Gothic tropes that were to be repurposed for the construction of an ecoGothic pedagogy. EcoGothic, according to David Del Principe (2014), 'examines the construction of the Gothic body – unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid... [and] how it can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation for environmental and species identity' (p. 1). Del Principe (2014) suggests that the very inception of nineteenth century version of Gothic was contained within the anxiety which stemmed from the 'Industrial Revolution' of the nineteenth century, where the distinction between the human and non-human was blurred. Indeed it was a fatal blow to the delicate balance humans shared with the nature prior to that era, best reflecting in the works of Dickens among others. EcoGothic is therefore an enquiry that is based in cultural purview related to the environmental concerns, mainly of conservation, using Gothic studies' frameworks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### THE POSTCOLONIAL GOTHIC AS A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

The Gothic as a literary genre is a powerful vehicle for teaching the fears of humanity and of exigencies. This is even more so for the postcolonial Gothic. Wisker (2007) has laid out a substantive blueprint for a postcolonial Gothic pedagogy, and this model is adapted in this article to incorporate the ecoGothic. Wisker (2007) asserts that the reading and teaching of the postcolonial Gothic is important in teaching students new perspectives on things. She discusses Gothic works by Beth Yahp, Toni Morrison, Nalo Hopkinson, Catherine Lim, and Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory*, and focuses mainly on readings of Erna Brodber's *Myal*. Wisker

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<sup>b</sup> Thomson's website was accessed in 2020, but has no date of publication listed.

(2007) stresses on the importance of not reading these texts under historical realism, but to explore the issues from the perspective of representation and interpretation. Wisker (2007) also advises the teacher to be aware of the belief system of the students, because talking about Postcolonial in a British classroom is problematic. Students are usually from diverse backgrounds, and those coming from 'White' may feel the guilt of their ancestors, while the 'others' may be subjected to an image of horror about what happened with their ancestors (Wisker 2007). It is therefore very important to balance each other out. However, there is a subtle point of contention in this article in relation to Wisker's assertion. This article holds that while the teacher should be mindful of such distinctions, they shouldn't make this distinction explicit in the classroom. Otherwise they will be doing exactly what their ancestors were blamed for, that is, discrimination and bias. Thus, it is necessary to make the students an active participant in the discussion, not just passive learner.

According to Wisker (2007), the postcolonial Gothic is an excellent place to start an engaging discussion about the key concepts, issues of representations, contexts, histories and culture. Reading postcolonial Gothic literature sheds light on alternative notions of places, visions, worldview, expressions etc. They also carry a certain ideological and imaginative energy. If properly applied, this experience can increase the awareness of the students about the topic. The postcolonial Gothic has the 'ability to destabilize and cause us as readers to question unproblematic readings of history, event, culture, and the world' Readers will therefore find the narrative both 'attractive, fascinating' as well as, "dangerous, repulsive, abject, to be rendered safe through the trajectory of disturbance and return to order" (p.423). It makes the students 'to take on board complex theories, and they have to work with these problematic, problematizing, disturbing texts in new ways' (Wisker, 2007, p.423). Wisker (2007) reiterates that the postcolonial Gothic then engages students "imaginatively, ideologically, critically, personally, emotionally, and analytically at a conceptual and then a practical level"(p. 423). Therefore, the pedagogical function of the ecoGothic is crucial to implement and can help to achieve better levels of environmental conservation, if applied correctly to our young generation.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research connects the pedagogical function of the postcolonial Gothic to the ecoGothic aspects of Bonds's three novellas. The method for study is of literary analysis, in which the corpus forms the data for the research. For the sake of clarity, it is important to differentiate this approach from Anita Harris Satkunanathan's (2019) postcolonial ecoGothic lens as the novellas operate in a different way from the hierarchical, power-relations based novels that formed the basis of Harris Satkunanathan's research. Rather, Bond's three novellas have a strong and metaphorical connection with nature. Therefore, the pedagogical aspect of the postcolonial Gothic framework is transposed upon an Indian ecoGothic framework, utilizing five key Gothic tropes in order to analyse the novels. Nelson and Cassell argued against the extensive usage of quantitative approaches to the environmental conversation. They make a case for a new framework of knowledge, one that:

...eschews the metaphor of the world as man-dominated machine. Instead ... [It] embraces a view of the world as a complex, multi-tiered, deeply interwoven system of natural and human elements all interacting with one another at various levels of operation and all operating within the bounds of system limits; limits with regard to resources available to the system

(Nelson & Cassell, 2012, p. 71)

An ecoGothic reading destabilizes the notion that the earth is somehow 'machinery' which can be managed through data and figures. The Gothic tropes mapped in these stories by

this article may act as a rudimentary framework for the future analysis of such other stories and being implemented in the curriculum as a means of raising eco-consciousness. Only five tropes have been used as befitting to the novellas in question, but Gothic studies possess a plethora of tropes, themes, motifs, patterns, images, symbols, and plots which can be successfully mapped on the eco-fiction to draw out parallels, thus making them interesting and educative at the same time for the young readers. In the formative years of young readers, it is important to ensure they are ready for the obstacles and predicaments they will be in as the planet hurtles towards more ecological and climate disasters.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### PARADIGMS OF INDIAN GOTHIC: AN OVERVIEW

Several writers have repurposed traditional Gothic tropes to highlight the Indian social elements present in and around the households. Molly Slavin in her article unearths Arundhati Roy's attempt to express her 'vision of hopes, regeneration and transformation' (Slavin, 2020, p.191) in the novel *The Ministry of Happiness*. Slavin (2020) asserts that Roy 'demonstrates for readers the potential of colonial Gothic tropes reinvented for a postcolonial audience, building off the initial Gothic vision of 'detached individual[ity]' to eventually articulate a justice-oriented vision of a community'(pp.198–199). This remodelling of western Gothic to incorporate Indian elements has paved the way for a new genre of Indian Gothic to emerge in its entirety.

On the other hand, Sourit Bhattacharya (2020) looks at ecoGothic themes in *Toy City*, (2004) by Nabarun Bhattacharya. The story deals with the issue of huge amount of toxic waste being dumped by the western developed countries into the global-south countries and the hazards that comes along with it. Sourit<sup>c</sup> notes the apocalyptic narration used by Nabarun to highlight the toxicity imbibed in the text, with its hazardous mountains and poisoned rivers, neo-colonial military's nuclear testing and the disabling environment (Bhattacharya 2020). According to Sourit, following the nuclear fallout, there is nothing but a ghostly atmosphere surrounding the city, accentuated by death and decay everywhere the eyes could see. There is a reference here to the numerous ecological disasters that have happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of them being the infamous Bhopal Gas Tragedy in India (1984).

Before the final wipe-out, Nabarun employs the 'three witches' device, who foretold about the death of remaining inhabitants. The three witches motif, used by William Shakespeare in *Macbeth* was repurposed from the three fates known for prophecy in more than one world myth. Faye Ringel (2009) writes that, "witch belief was not central to the first Gothic revival" but that they have appeared in Gothic literature to play roles such as "divination; communing with the spirits of the dead" (pp. 259-260). The trope of the three witches therefore, exist in the story to underscore and emphasise the impending tragedy of ecological disasters. Sourit notes that Nabarun undermines and remodels the classic fable genre of storytelling by blending it with the ecoGothic in order to "remind us of the essential paradox of postcolonial life" (p.579). Sourit (2020) comments that while the fable genre "is known for its features of anthropomorphised non-human beings, plain storytelling style, short dialogues and a moral message", in Nabarun's ecoGothic narrative the fable of the three witches "are either undermined or inverted in this dystopic tale of socio-ecological crisis through a radical use of narratorial interventions' (p.585). Precisely, it is the deployment of narratorial interventions in the Indian Gothic that makes these works ripe for pedagogical deployment and analysis.

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<sup>c</sup> Since both the writer and critic have the same last name, this article will be using their first name to differentiate between them.

## THE PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTION OF THE ECOGOTHIC

Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013) edited a seminal collection on the *EcoGothic* in which they presented and advocated for studying and applying Gothic in ecocritical study. Smith and Hughes (2017) describe this book as an attempt to apply the Gothic studies of the ‘body as a site of Gothic fear- sexual, injured, dismembered and celebrated- [which] can be seen and positively re-membered in a literary landscape’ (p. 8). Smith and Hughes (2017) aver that the groundbreaking book on the study of the ecoGothic commissioned all of the chapters particularly because they represented “a new way of thinking of the Gothic, particularly because they “indicate the way in which [the Gothic] engages with a major pressing political issue that confronts the world today” (p.13). Smith and Hughes’s introduction to the ecoGothic (2017) may be read in tandem with Wisker’s assertion of the pedagogical value of the postcolonial Gothic. Wisker (2007) writes that it is important to consider the belief systems of students when teaching any postcolonial Gothic texts, and this particularly imperative when the nature of climate crisis and ecological disasters are taught alongside the messages encoded in the texts. An understanding of the cultural background and belief systems of students is really important from an Indian perspective as in order to enable students to understand the importance of respecting nature and the threat of capitalism and neoliberalism upon nature, their native beliefs need to be considered.

Bayan Almmouri and Dina Salman (2021) connect the growth of posthumanism to the "proliferation of neoliberal rationality" which their opinions have changed the meaning and status of humanity (p.225). Neoliberalism has also contributed to a growth in urbanism which impacts climate change in the global south. Almmouri and Salman (2021) aver that technology is a "hegemonic neoliberal tool that ensures the decentralization of the human and the persistence of the neoliberal logic" (p.226). Technology is a double-edged sword that both uplifts humanity but contributes to the present climate crisis. As such a return to an organic relationship with nature is often the subject of works of fiction with ecoGothic themes.

Harris Satkunanathan (2019) espoused a merging between the postcolonial Gothic and the ecoGothic to be read as the postcolonial ecoGothic particularly for works of fiction which have such overlapping parameters (p.526). Harris Satkunanathan asserts that reading the ecoGothic through a postcolonial Gothic lens is important because although “the Gothic as a genre may not seem overtly political particularly because of its state of ambiguity, but the postcolonial Gothic certainly is political” (p.528). Read through a postcolonial Gothic lens, then, the ecoGothic becomes the site of not just a connection between human being and nature with all of its antecedent terrors and moments of sublimity but as a connection between nature and power relations. Therefore, a postcolonial ecoGothic pedagogy is particularly an important approach both for literary analysis and for the dissemination of eco-critical values in the related texts through teaching plans and syllabuses in the current age of political upheaval coupled with competing climate change agendas.

### FIVE PARALLELS BETWEEN GOTHIC AND ECOGOTHIC: A PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

For the analysis of the novellas, five tropes have been selected and adjusted accordingly to be applicable to ecoGothic paradigm by adding the eco-critical scrutiny. These tropes were partially derived from an online pedagogical project undertaken by Thomson who listed these commonly understood tropes from a project with students, although for purposes of this article and research the tropes were renamed based on how they correspond to the ecoGothic elements in Indian Gothic tales, and augmented by references in Maria Mulvey Roberts’s curation of the seminal *The Handbook of the Gothic* (2009). These tropes are chosen on the basis of their easy accessibility and archetypal description for literary analysis. These tropes may be identified

easily in the stories, and yet they are powerful enough to have the sublime quality, which according to Burke, is the greatest emotion one is capable to achieve. As a result, they are capable of having a tangible effect on the psyche of the learners and work to instil a sense of ecological conversation if used and taught correctly by the educational institution. These elements as outlined by Thomson and his students in his digital humanities project have been repurposed and retitled as the Alter-Ego/ Gothic Double, Distressed Heroine, the Sublime and Grief, Sympathy for the Devil, and Byronic Gothic Hero.

The Alter Ego or the Gothic Double is reflected in the relation between Human and Nature, where each other are simultaneously dependent on each other for fulfilling their need. Alter-ego, by definition is the recognition of self into others, usually to fill a void or improve a flaw. It can be understood 'as a psychic projection caused by unresolved anxieties...as possessing traits both complementary and antithetical to the character involved' (Thomson, par. 18). Antonio Ballesteros Gonzalez (2009) writes that the Alter Ego is a "recurrent motif in Gothic and horror literature" and primarily stems from "the anthropological belief in an innate duality in man (p.119). From an ecoGothic perspective, the alter Ego may connect a synthetic "doppelganger" to the relationship between Humans, nature, and technology. For example, Humans use Nature not only for survival but also to learn and make their life better. They imitate nature for techniques of producing food, creating shelters, daily activities etc. The design of aeroplane's wings was imitated using birds' flight pattern observed by Wright Brothers. Today we even have a term to describe this phenomenon, which is called 'Biomimicry', literally meaning to imitate the model, designs and architecture found in nature to solve complex human problems.

Next, is the classic Gothic trope of the damsel in distress, which in eco-criticism may be likened to the state of eco-dwellers, those who live closest to nature, when they are in distress during natural calamities. They are surrounded by the disaster and feel helpless. In the fiction, they are usually either saved by divine intervention or some human agency, but it is always a narrow escape, showing that even a little bit deviation could have led the people stuck in disasters lose their precious life, or be seriously injured at least. The third trope is Grief which is connected to the feeling of the sublime, although not grand as other but still powerful enough to cause distress. The cause of grief can be both internal, i.e. stems from personal tragedy or external where the grief is felt through substitution, resulting in sympathy. In eco-criticism, this can be felt when witnessing the great events of natural disasters, when one is not within the reach of disaster but still feels troubled. For the purposes of this article, this particular form of Grief is referred to as Burkean Grief, because of its strong underpinnings of the Sublime.

The fourth element is that of 'Sympathy for the Devil'. It is a trope where the audience, through the lens of hero or otherwise, witness the inner emotions and turmoil of the villains, and sympathize for him/her. They make a case for villain being a morally ambiguous character, where on one hand his actions are not justified entirely, but at least provide a basis to judge where did the villain went wrong and what led to his downfall. Milton's Paradise Lost's first few books literally make the readers sympathize for the 'Devil' i.e. Lucifer himself is perhaps the biggest example ever in the literary history. The last element is that of the Byronic Gothic Hero. Byronic Hero, such as Don Juan among others, who has a tendency to be majestic, fierce, moody, solitary, cynical and emotionally wounded. Any combinations of these characteristics qualify a protagonist to be labelled as Byronic Hero. It is 'a later variation of the "antithetically mixed" Villain-Hero' (Thomson, par.125). Helen Stoddart (2009) writes that the "hero-villain necessarily bears the dual markings of both villain and victim" (p.176). This trope achieves its Gothic trait when it is employed in an identifiable manner of being lost, hurt, feared, dismembered etc. Such an element is useful to study the nature which is both predator and prey at times, and is helpful in disseminating an understanding of morally ambiguous characters to students.

## DISCUSSION

### ANGRY RIVER: FIGHTING AGAINST FLOOD

*Angry River* was first published in 1972 and focuses on a little girl named Sita who lives with her grandparents on a small island. Sita has a doll, named 'Mumta' which she made herself and she has conversations with the doll when she is alone. The island is in the middle of a river. There is one old and big tree in the middle of the island which gains prominence in the story and is at the center of the ecoGothic motifs that will be discussed. The family lives in a hut, though poorly constructed. Sita's family leads a plain life with her grandfather working outside and grandmother who falls sick and is thus in urgent need of care. Her grandfather decides to take her to hospital in the town, and when they are gone, the river is flooded due to excessive rain. Sita tries to prepare for the flood by tying up her belongings before ascending a tree. She is swept away when the tree is uprooted and is saved by a boy on a boat named Krishan, also the name of a prominent Hindu God. After a few days, the water level goes down and Sita returns to the island with her grandparents. Krishan comes back after some months for the flute he gave to Sita before separating. Sita now has a new insight about the relationship between the humans and the river, because of the way in which she is rescued. This is a good example of the tendency of Bond's narratives to teach valuable lessons about the relationship between humans and nature through scenes of accidents and emergencies with ensuing rescues.

The relationship between the doll and Sita is very similar to the relationship between humanity and nature. This duo acts as an Alter Ego or Gothic double. It is interesting to note that the name of the doll, 'Mumta' means 'Maternal feelings' in Hindi. Sita most likely who has no mother created this doll in order to fill the maternal void in her life. Here she is both the creator of the doll, and associates the doll with the act of creation, mothering and caring. By the end of the novella, Sita herself has faced her creator in the form of her life-saver, Krishan. During the story, when Sita loses the doll due to flooding, and is swaying on the tree, she questions that perhaps the God has forgot about her the same way she has forgot about her doll in all this commotion. '...if I can be careless with someone I've made, how can I expect the god to notice me, alone in the middle of the river?' (Bond, 2010a, p. 79). But that was not the case as Sita is rescued by a God-like figure. Later, when the flood subsides, she finds another toy, a wooden colored peacock. Evidently, a peacock's feather is also a traditional religious symbol associated with Hindu God Krishan. River itself also presents a duality in itself, where it is calm and nourishing on one hand and destructive and erosive on the other.

"Sometimes the river is angry, and sometimes it is kind," said Sita.  
"We are part of the river," said the boy. "We cannot live without it."

(2010a, p. 93)

Sita may be classified under the trope of 'distressed heroine', under the modified classification of this paper, a classification modeled on the trope of the Gothic heroine. Under this trope, the heroine is pursued and persecuted by a villainous figure in a terrifying landscape. Ironically, here the 'landscape' itself becomes the villainous figure, that is, the River. Nevertheless, the River cannot be classified as villainous, so the trope is a little subverted. This trope, under ecoGothic may be applied to understand the psyche of people who are caught in natural disasters. Through this, readers may study how one can learn to adapt to nature in order to live in harmony with it. The river is eternal and does take on the role of a villainous figure from time to time, but it is not its whole existence. To understand the fickle nature of river is to understand nature, which is crucial in the present scenario of ecological crises.



"It was the tree that saved you," he said.

"And the boy," said Sita

...

Sita planted a mango-seed in the same spot where the peepul tree had stood. It would be many years before it grew into a big tree, but Sita liked to imagine sitting in its branches one day

(2010a, p. 91)

From a pedagogical perspective, highlighting the importance of the nature of the river enables students to engage with the idea of conserving the river's natural habitat. The motif of rescue fully underscores the importance of trees to save humanity, often from themselves. This motif may also be found in the next novella analysed in this article.

#### DUST ON THE MOUNTAIN: DEFORESTATION AND DEHUMANIZATION

*Dust on the Mountain* by Ruskin Bond was first published in 1990. The novella highlights the issues of deforestation, excessive drilling on the mountains, and what grim results are followed when one tries to disturb the delicate balance within nature. Bisnu, the protagonist, lives with his younger sister and mother in Tehri, Garhwal -- a small village in the hills. Due to scarce rainfall and snowfall, the orchards were barely fruitful. Scarcity of water led to problems with food rations and income. To save his family, Bishnu decides to go to Mussoorie during summer time when there is an influx of tourists on hill station. One may easily find a job during this period, and so Bishnu becomes a tea-seller during intervals in a cinema hall. But in winter, the cinema shuts down, and one of Bishnu's co-workers takes him to a mining site and he gets a job on a truck as a cleaner. The truck driver and owner, Pritam was responsible for carrying the rocks or 'dust' from the quarry to the processing plant in order to generate lime powder. Bishnu took the job with heavy heart, as he felt sickened with the sight of mountains losing their green shine and becoming dust-filled plain areas. One day, while attempting to save a mule, the truck topples and rolls down the valley and is stopped from its perilous descent by a tree trunk on the cliff. Bishnu then realizes the importance of trees and decides to go back to his village. Pritam Singh too retires to go back to his village. This very strongly fable-drenched tale has didactic qualities which can therefore be used to teach students the value of respecting nature and of the importance of trees.

The sense of home and the return to it is integral to the juxtaposition of human life and the forceful state of nature in this novella. Mohammed Lami S. A. Shamallakh, Ravichandran Vengadasamy, and Mohamed Zain Sulaiman (2021) opine that the relationship between "the self and the space is also the key to the abstract dimension of home which extends beyond the physical space and structure of a dwelling to a more psychological, social and emotional dimension" (p.275). This abstraction when contrasted with the totality of nature at its most visceral in Bond's works invokes the feeling of the Sublime. For Burke, the Sublime is the highest emotion one can feel when they are faced with the terror. He describes it the source of sublime as 'to excite the ideas of pain and danger...or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*' (Burke, 2005). Vijay Mishra (2012) writes that Burkean "capitulation" to the Sublime is not unlike a "religious experience" (p.290). This sense of astonishment akin to a religious epiphany is very strongly felt in the novella, as Bishnu first feels frightened and then he is overtaken with awe when he sees the trees are being uprooted due to mining activity. His first thought then is of respect for nature, and the need to preserve his home.

Bishnu watched in awe as shrubs and small trees were flung into the air. It always frightened him — not so much the sight of the rocks bursting asunder, as the trees being flung aside and destroyed. He thought of the trees at home — the walnut, the chestnuts, the pines — and wondered if one day they would suffer the same fate, and whether the mountains would all become a desert like this particular range. No trees, no grass, no water — only the choking dust of mines and quarries.

(Bond, 2010b, pp. 109–110)

This feeling may be classified as Burkean Grief, where one feels sad not owing through their own plight but through identification with what is lost. Later, when a tree saves him from death, Bishnu realizes the importance of trees and returns to his village. ‘It’s better to grow things on the land than to blast things out of it.’ (2010b, p. 113). This is close to a didactic message in the novella, thus underscoring its pedagogical value when read by students – they are able to connect to the loss and destruction of nature through the sense of Burkean Grief and the sublime is able to uplift the senses into understanding the importance of preserving nature.

### ***TIGER, TIGER BURNING BRIGHT: WILDLIFE CONSERVATION***

In this novella, Bond is narrating the story to his grandson Rakesh about a tiger. The tiger is old and senile, and lives in the jungle by a river. Owing to the clearing of the forests by the villagers of a nearby settlement, the population of wild animals in that particular forest is on a rapid decline. Farming and growing settlements have decimated the natural habitat of the animals, along with poachers and hunters who stalk lions, tigers, leopards etc. They proudly display the skins on the walls, or sell it in market. Almost all the tigers of the forest have been hunted down, except for one. This tiger is particularly experienced in evading the hunters, and skillfully remains out of sight. The tiger avoids the river bank as it is an open land, so he heads to an inner lake, which too is shrinking rapidly. Villagers use this lake for their buffaloes and cows, which tiger does not hunt as a rule so as to not agitate the villagers. It keeps mostly to itself, and roars from time to time to see if any other fellow tiger replies back. But there are none left.

The tiger also makes an unlikely friendship with a village boy, Ramu, whom it saves from a bear, which Ramu repays this good deed by saving the tiger later in the story. One day, a hunter shoots him in the limb while it is on a bridge; the tiger falls down and get washed away. At this point, Bond stops and asks Rakesh to complete the story, by giving it a fitting end. Rakesh thinks about it, and comes back later with a justified end. The tiger, according to Rakesh, is washed away to a faraway place, where he heals his wounds and sees the grown vegetation around him. There is also a distinct smell of a tigress that the tiger senses. Its roar is met with a roar, and the tiger moves toward the sound, knowing there will be more tigers in the future.

The tiger is also a Byronic Gothic hero in a theriomorphic sense. It is a majestic creature who roams fiercely in the forest. It is solitary, cynical and emotionally wounded, and physically wounded later in the story. The tiger is therefore a Villain-hero who simply falls prey to the circumstances and breaks the sacred trust between him and the villagers by eating their buffaloes. Throughout its stay in the forest, he led a secretive life, by evading humans and others by lying in the long grasses. But when the draught hits and the grass wither away, the tiger is exposed to the hunters and villagers, and it gets shot.

Although the tiger had passed the prime of his life, he had lost none of his majesty. His muscles rippled beneath the golden yellow of his coat, and he walked through the long grass with the confidence of one who knew that he was still a king, even though his subjects were fewer. His great head pushed through the foliage, and it was only his tail, swinging high, that showed occasionally above the sea of grass.

(2013, p.278)

There exists a “sympathy for the devil” trope in this novella, as seen in a scenario where the hero realizes that the ‘Devil’ is not all bad and actually has a vulnerable side to him. The devil here is the tiger, in the sense that it too has fallen from the grace, which was its original position of supremacy. The tiger, in quite a literal sense, was solitary. Nevertheless, the tiger still maintained its nobility and integrity by saving Ramu. However, the tiger unfortunately violated his only rule of not killing village animals when it was forced to do so due to draught which led all the animals away. As a result, the tiger had no animal left to kill for food and as a final resort, had to kill the village buffalo, something which was mutually understood to be forbidden. Bond portrays this inner turmoil of the tiger beautifully in the story and this is the exemplification of the morally ambiguous characteristics of the hero-villain. When the tiger is at last evicted from the forest, the villagers feel a loss of nobility, as if they had lost a great protector.

[The villagers] feel that something had gone out of their lives, out of the life of the forest; they began to feel that the forest was no longer a forest. It had been shrinking year by year, but, as long as the tiger had been there and the villagers had heard it roar at night, they had known that they were still secure from the intruders and newcomers who came to fell the trees and eat up the land and let the flood waters into the village. But, now that the tiger had gone, it was as though a protector had gone, leaving the forest open and vulnerable, easily destroyable. And, once the forest was destroyed, they too would be in danger.... There was another thing that had gone with the tiger, another thing that had been lost, a thing that was being lost everywhere—something called ‘nobility’. Ramu remembered something that his grandfather had once said, ‘The tiger is the very soul of India, and when the last tiger has gone, so will the soul of the country.’

(2013, p.318)

The very touching excerpt above very powerfully underscores the importance of respecting the animal world and the natural world – from a pedagogical and didactic aspect, it enables students to connect Indian consciousness and symbols to a deeper, more abiding respect of nature. This is where the Indian Gothic works particularly well in developing the pedagogical markers of the ecoGothic.

## CONCLUSION

A case has been made in this article for the reading of the ecoGothic as a pedagogical approach utilising Wisker’s research, as separate from a postcolonial ecoGothic approach because of a diversity of ecoGothic views that reflect the diversity of the challenges facing different nations of the world in relation to the climate crisis of the 21st century. The pedagogical apparatus deployed in a literary analysis of the text also utilises the glossaries from Thomson’s digital humanities Gothic project and Roberts’s *The Handbook of the Gothic*. Bond’s texts is firmly in the canon of Indian Gothic literature and the unique nature of Indian Gothic literature requires its own pedagogical approach. It is hoped that this article will pave the way towards further inquiries into the pedagogical possibilities of teaching Bond’s novellas from the perspective of the ecoGothic. All three novellas by Bond depict the kind of destruction that is caused by human activity upon the land and underscores the ways in which causes conflict between characters, animals in nature and the landscape which in itself has a strong character. This then, is the way in which these tales can be powerful teaching tales that may be incorporated in the Indian primary curriculum. The findings through the analysis of these tales reveal the ways in which fear and the Sublime can evoke a healthy respect for the sanctity of the environment and this is a sanctity which must be protected. As exemplified in the discussion of all three novellas, the Gothic tropes found within each tale connects readers to the sense of awe and wonder at nature, and the feeling of loss within its destruction. With characters such as the tiger in *Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright*, the narratives anchor deep into the sense of Indian

identity and from a postcolonial Gothic pedagogical perspective, allows the students reading the texts to fully understand the value of preserving and protecting nature. Without these elements of nature, the integrity and the sense of Indian identity would also be lost.

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