

Ecological Advocacy in Indian Literature: From Sangam Poetry to Ruskin Bond

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ASH-2026-13039751

Volume: 13

Issue: 3

Month: January

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 24.11.2025

Accepted: 25.12.2025

Published Online: 01.01.2026

Citation:
Antony Raj, Y., and V.
Francis. "Ecological
Advocacy in Indian
Literature: From Sangam
Poetry to Ruskin Bond." *Shanlax International
Journal of Arts, Science and
Humanities*, vol. 13, no. 3,
2026, pp. 163–67.

DOI:
[https://doi.org/10.34293/
sijash.v13i3.9751](https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13i3.9751)



This work is licensed
under a Creative Commons
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
International License

Y. Antony Raj

*Research Scholar, Research Department of English
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy, Tamil Nadu India*

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1422-5672>

V. Francis

*Associate Professor, Research Department of English
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy, Tamil Nadu India*

Abstract

*Indian literature, from the Sangam period to contemporary fiction, has consistently highlighted the close connection between humans and the natural world. In Sangam poetry, rivers, hills, and forests are portrayed as living companions that guide behaviour, shape moral understanding, and influence human life. This deep ecological awareness continues in modern Indian writing in English, particularly in the works of Ruskin Bond. Through his gentle and simple narrative style, Bond presents the Himalayan hills, orchards, rivers, and small towns not merely as settings but as spaces that nurture memory, identity, and ethical sensibilities. By examining *The Room on the Roof* (1956), *Time Stops at Shamli* (1965), and *A Long Walk for Bina* (2002), this study highlights Bond's celebration of personal freedom in open landscapes, his reflection on the effects of modernisation, and the ways in which communities draw strength from their local environments. When read alongside Sangam poetry, Bond's writings demonstrate the continuity of ecological advocacy in Indian literature and emphasise the enduring relevance of India's environmental and cultural imagination. The study also opens up scope for future research by encouraging comparative ecological readings of other Indian regional literatures alongside Indian English fiction.*

Keywords: Ruskin Bond, Ecological Advocacy, Sangam Literature, Indian Writing in English, Cultural Ecology, Identity and Nature.

Introduction

Indian literature has always highlighted the close relationship between humans and the natural world, portraying nature not just as a background but as an active presence that shapes feelings, values, and behaviour. This perspective is especially clear in ancient Tamil Sangam poetry, where rivers, hills, and forests are seen as companions guiding human life. Poets such as Paranar, Kapilar, and Auvaiyar give life to this vision. Paranar observes that rivers "carry the strength of life with them", teaching endurance; Kapilar describes the hills as "guardians that stand firm for generations", emphasising stability and protection; and Auvaiyar says, "The tree that bears fruit bends low", inspiring humility and patience. These works show that Indian culture has long recognised the deep connection between people and nature, forming a strong tradition of ecological awareness.

This understanding continues in modern Indian English literature, particularly in Ruskin Bond's writings. His long association with the Himalayan region makes him see nature as a friend, teacher and source of emotional and moral support. Bond often notes, "The hills are home; I belong

to them,” and writes, “To be with trees and sunshine is to be at peace,” reflecting how closely the natural environment shapes his inner life. In his stories, gardens, forests, rivers, and hill towns help characters find identity, memory, and moral guidance, showing that nature continues to be a central influence on human life.

While many studies have discussed Bond’s love for the mountains, his simplicity, and his nostalgic tone, very few have explored his ecological perspective through an Indian lens. Most research relies on Western ecocritical approaches or focuses mainly on descriptive accounts of nature, leaving deeper ethical and cultural aspects underexplored. Similarly, although Sangam poetry is celebrated for its ecological insights, its connection with modern Indian writing in English has rarely been studied. This highlights a clear gap in scholarship, emphasising the need for a comparative approach rooted in India’s literary and cultural traditions.

This article seeks to fill this gap by reading Bond’s Himalayan settings alongside Sangam ecological thought. Analysing works such as *The Room on the Roof*, *Time Stops at Shamlı* and *A Long Walk for Bina* in conversation with classical Tamil poetry, it proposes the idea of Cultural–Ecological Continuity. By placing ancient Tamil poetry in dialogue with modern Indian writing, this study clearly shows that ecological awareness has existed in Indian literature for many centuries. This understanding confirms that environmental consciousness is not a new concept but a deep-rooted cultural strength that continues to shape contemporary Indian ecocriticism.

Objectives and Scope of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine the ecological vision present in ancient Tamil Sangam poetry.
- To analyse Ruskin Bond’s representation of nature in selected fictional works.
- To compare Sangam ecological thought with Bond’s environmental sensibility.
- To establish a cultural–ecological continuity in Indian literature from classical to modern times.
- To highlight how nature functions as a moral, emotional and cultural guide in Indian literary traditions.

The scope of the study is limited to selected Sangam poems and three major works of Ruskin Bond, analysed through a comparative, culturally rooted ecocritical framework.

Review of Literature

Ecocriticism as a literary approach has been widely discussed by scholars such as Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, who emphasise the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Buell highlights how literary texts shape environmental imagination while Glotfelty views ecocriticism as a study of the connection between human culture and nature. In the Indian context, scholars such as Rashmi Jain and Geeta Sahu have explored ecological concerns in Indian English fiction, pointing out how writers respond to environmental degradation and human responsibility towards nature.

Sangam literature has received critical attention for its ecological depth. Studies by George L. Hart, A. K. Ramanujan and Selvakumar reveal how landscapes such as kurinji, marutham and neithal are closely linked with human emotions and ethical values. Recent research by Ravikumar and Kanimozhi highlighted environmental conservation and water consciousness in classical Tamil texts. However, most of these studies focus either on classical Tamil literature or modern Indian writing. Although several critics have written about Ruskin Bond’s love for nature and the Himalayas, very few studies have placed his ecological vision within an indigenous Indian ecological tradition. Most existing research applies Western ecocritical theories without connecting them to classical Indian literary concepts. This gap makes a comparative study of Sangam poetry and Bond’s works necessary and significant.

Methodology

The study adopts a comparative literary methodology grounded in ecocritical analysis. It closely reads selected Sangam poems and Ruskin Bond’s fiction to identify recurring ecological themes such as harmony with nature, moral learning from landscapes, and cultural memory embedded in natural surroundings. This study combines textual analysis with cultural interpretation, placing ancient Tamil ecological thought in dialogue with modern Indian English fiction. Rather than applying Western ecocritical models alone, this study consciously uses an Indian literary and cultural framework to understand ecological advocacy.

Nature and Liberation in The Room on the Roof

In *The Room on the Roof*, Ruskin Bond portrays nature as a central force in Rusty's emotional development and identity search. Gardens, sunlight, open air and the vast sky are not merely backdrops; they actively shape Rusty's feelings, thoughts and moral understanding. Under the strict supervision of his guardian, Rusty feels confined and isolated. However, when he steps into the garden or open spaces, he experiences a sense of relief and freedom. As Bond describes, "the sunlight fell directly on him... and he felt as if the sunshine was filling his body with a strange new power," showing how the natural world energises and inspires him. The garden becomes a safe haven where Rusty feels "free to breathe, free to play, free to think," allowing him to reflect on himself and his surroundings. Nature also acts as a silent companion; Bond notes, "the trees listened to him in the quiet afternoon and the silence around him was friendly," suggesting that Rusty finds comfort and emotional support in the calm of natural spaces. The wind on his face further encourages him to imagine a life beyond the restrictions of his guardian, hinting at the courage that nature nurtures in him. These moments demonstrate how nature functions as a guide and healer shaping Rusty's confidence, autonomy and self-awareness.

The parallels between Rusty's growth and the ecological sensibilities in Sangam literature are striking. In classical Tamil poetry, rivers, hills and forests are considered living companions that teach patience, courage and moral balance. Paranar depicts rivers and fertile plains as guides that sustain human life, echoing Rusty's experience of calm and clarity in gardens and open spaces. Kapilar describes hills and quiet pathways as steady protectors, reflecting the comfort Rusty finds in orchards, trees and open skies as he escapes the rigid atmosphere of his guardian's house. Auvaiyar often portrays trees as symbols of generosity, patience and moral stability, aligning with Rusty's moments of reflection under their shade. Sangam literature also links emotional states with landscapes; quiet forests signify trust, patience, and inner peace which resonate with Rusty's restorative experiences in nature. Together, these examples highlight the classical Indian view of nature as a companion that nurtures emotional and moral understanding.

Ecology and Cultural Memory in Time Stops at Shamli

In *Time Stops at Shamli*, Ruskin Bond illustrates how the town's natural surroundings are closely tied to its emotional and cultural life. He portrays the trees as "old friends, their branches hanging over the houses as if keeping watch," suggesting that nature has grown with the people and shares their history. The river also becomes a bearer of memory; as Bond notes, it "moved slowly, as though it carried with it the town's secrets and sorrows," giving the impression that it absorbs the moods and experiences of the community. Walking beneath the banyan tree brings the narrator into intimate contact with the past because "under the banyan tree, time seemed to pause and the past came quietly to mind." Through such descriptions, Bond shows that the landscape is not merely a backdrop but "shapes the life of everyone who lived there," acting as an active presence that forms identity, memory and the town's collective spirit. Even the quiet atmosphere enhances reflection; in Bond's words, "in the stillness of Shamli, even the wind seemed to whisper forgotten stories," emphasizing how nature becomes a companion, a keeper of memory and a guide to emotional understanding.

Viewed through the lens of Sangam literature, Bond's ideas reflect a classical Indian ecological consciousness. Sangam poets often treated rivers, hills and forests as living companions that guide human life and bring communities together. Paranar, in describing the marutham landscape, writes that the river "flows with the strength that sustains the people", showing how water bodies nourish and protect those who live nearby. Kapilar, in his poems on the kurinji region, speaks of the mountains as "standing firm for ages, guarding the land and its people," and he describes the hill winds as "cool breaths that steady the heart," which resembles the comfort the Shamli hills provide to its residents. Auvaiyar, known for her simple yet wise sayings, connects trees and nature with moral values. She reminds us, "The tree that bears fruit always bends low," teaching patience and humility and she says, "Give as the tree gives, quietly and without pride," linking generosity with the natural world. Her image of trees as silent teachers echoes Bond's portrayal

of the banyan tree in Shamli, which holds memories and provides emotional strength to those who rest under it.

Ecological Awareness and Human Resilience in A Long Walk for Bina

In *A Long Walk for Bina* (2002), Ruskin Bond portrays the Himalayan landscape as an ever-present companion in Bina's daily journey. Nature is depicted as possessing quiet wisdom. When Bond writes that the mountains "know the way better than she does," he implies that the hills guide, support and strengthen those who traverse them. Through this simple walk, the story suggests that human resilience develops naturally when one moves in harmony with the earth.

This idea resonates closely with the ecological perspective found in Sangam literature. The poets of the Sangam era often present nature as a source of support for those who approach it respectfully. Paranar, for instance highlights hills and rivers as protectors of travellers and communities demonstrating that the land itself is a living presence that nurtures human life. In Bond's story, Bina's steady climb up the slopes mirrors this notion as the mountains provide both physical stability and emotional confidence.

Bond highlights that we learn important lessons by observing and interacting with the natural world. Crossing rivers, walking through forest paths and climbing steep Himalayan steps teach Bina patience, careful judgment and self-reliance. As Bond notes, "every bend in the path taught her something," suggesting that experience in nature helps build character and wisdom. Similarly, Kapilar's poems illustrate how rivers and mountains influence and guide the lives of the people who live near them.

Bond explores the learning ethics of nature. Spending time in forests and mountains teaches humility and self-discipline, because nature "shows what must be respected". This idea is similar to Auvaiyar's teaching, where trees, rivers and the sky act as examples to show balance, generosity and careful living. Her statement that "the tree gives more than it takes", reflects how Bina learns moral lessons from the forest and hills, making her journey both physical and ethical.

When Bond's narrative is read alongside Paranar, Kapilar and Auvaiyar, it becomes clear that

ecological understanding grows through experience and observation. Qualities like courage, patience and ethical maturity develop through interaction with nature. Just as Sangam poets viewed landscapes as essential to human identity, Bond presents the Himalayas as shaping Bina's inner growth. In both cases, nature acts as a guide, protector and teacher showing that resilience comes from living in harmony with the natural world.

Suggestions and Future Directions

- Future research may extend this comparative ecological approach to other Indian regional literatures, such as Malayalam, Kannada, and Bengali writings.
- Similar studies may explore poetry, autobiography and children's literature to understand ecological consciousness across genres.
- Further research should examine Indigenous ecological ethics in tribal and folk narratives alongside Indian English literature.
- Interdisciplinary studies combining literature, environmental studies and cultural history may enrich Indian ecocritical discourse.

Conclusion

Ruskin Bond's writings repeatedly show that nature is not a separate entity but an active presence that shapes human emotions, identity and collective memory. This perspective aligns closely with the ecological understanding found in Sangam literature, where rivers, hills and forests are seen as living companions that guide human behaviour and moral development. In *The Room on the Roof*, Rusty experiences freedom and self-awareness in gardens and under the open sky reflecting the Sangam belief that landscapes nurture emotional balance and strengthen the mind.

In *Time Stops at Shamli*, the trees and river seem to grow and flow with the town's history, echoing Paranar's view that natural features preserve the community's memory and social cohesion. In *A Long Walk for Bina*, the mountains "know the way better than she does," showing how the Himalayan terrain quietly guides Bina's courage, patience and ethical growth, much like Kapilar's portrayal of hills as teachers of resilience. Auvaiyar's wisdom, where trees, rivers, and the wind offer lessons in humility,

balance, and thoughtful living, resonates with the experiences Bond's characters gain from nature.

References

Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 11th ed., Cengage Learning, 2015.

Ainkurunuru. Translated by V. Murugan, New Century Book House, 2018.

Auvaiyar. *Selected Poems*. Translated by A. K. Ramanujan, Oxford University Press, 2015.

Balasubramanian, P. "Focus on Ecocriticism: Okur Masathiya Songs." *International Research Journal of Tamil*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2024, pp. 1-8.

Bond, Ruskin. *A Long Walk for Bina*. Penguin Books, 2002.

Bond, Ruskin. *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. Penguin Books, 1991.

Bond, Ruskin. *The Lamp Is Lit: A Memoir*. Penguin Books, 1997.

Bond, Ruskin. *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories*. Penguin Books, 1989.

Bond, Ruskin. *The Room on the Roof*. Puffin Books, 1956.

Bond, Ruskin. *Time Stops at Shamli and Other Stories*. Penguin Books, 1965.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

"Ecocriticism in Sangam Literature!" *Pachaiboomi: Tamil Poetry and Environmental Consciousness*, 2022, en.pachaiboomi.net.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Hart, George L., and Hank Heifetz, translators. *Akanānūru*. Penguin Classics, 2013.

Hart, George L., translator. *Purananuru*. Columbia University Press, 1999.

Hulluru, Kalpana Rao, and Angela Sebastian. "Ecofeminist Literary Pedagogy in India." *Indialogs*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2024.

Jain, Rashmi. "Green Studies/Ecocriticism in Indian English Fiction." *The Creative Launcher*, 2023.

Kanimozhi, K. B. "Environmental Protection in Kurunthogai." *International Journal of Transformations in Language and Literature Studies (IJTLLS)*, vol. 6, special issue 1, Oct. 2023.

Kapilar. *Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil*. Translated by A. K. Ramanujan, Columbia University Press, 1985.

Paranar. *Kuruntokai: Classical Tamil Love Poems*. Translated by A. K. Ramanujan, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Ravikumar, B. "Ecological Records in Tamil Classical Literature." *International Research Journal of Tamil*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2022, pp. 391–399.

Saloni. "A Study of Nature in Ruskin Bond's Works." *Leadership, Education, Personality: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 18, no. 12, 2023, pp. 70–75.

Selvakumar, V. *Representation of Water and Water Bodies in Ca-kam Texts: An Ecocritical Approach*. Tamil University, 2018.

Shikhar, Divya. "Coming of Age in Nature: An Ecocritical Reading of Ruskin Bond's The Room on the Roof." *International Journal of Trends in Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2024, pp. 13–17.

Sahu, Geeta. "Ecocriticism—Understanding the Relationship Between Literature and Environment in Indian English Novels." *Sai Om Journal of Arts & Education*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014.

Subash, S. "A Study on Conservation of Water Bodies in Sangam Literature." *International Research Journal of Tamil*, vol. 4, special issue S13, 2022, pp. 395–399.

"Green Lore." *Down to Earth*, 2025, downtoearth.org.in/environment/green-lore-44755.

Author Details

Y. Antony Raj, Research Scholar, Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy, Tamil Nadu India, **Email ID**: antony.raj6@gmail.com
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1422-5672>

V. Francis, Associate Professor, Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy, Tamil Nadu India, **Email ID**: joel.inian@gmail.com