

ESSENCE OF ETHICS AND ETHOS IN THE SELECT WORKS OF RUSKIN BOND AND SUDHA MURTHY

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Abstract

The reflection of ethos and ethics in literature offers readers a profound understanding of human values, cultural norms, and moral choices. This paper explores how Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy, two stalwarts of Indian-English literature, weave ethos and ethical considerations into their narratives. Through selected works, it examines how both authors project moral sensibilities, promote cultural identity, and instill humane values, making their stories timeless and relevant across generations.

Keywords: Ethos, Ethics, Ruskin Bond, Sudha Murthy, Indian values, Moral literature

Introduction: Literature has always mirrored societal norms, cultural beliefs, and moral dilemmas. Authors, consciously or unconsciously, embed their ethos-the character and credibility-and ethics-the principles that govern right and wrong-into their writings. Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy, celebrated voices in Indian literature, offer simple yet profound narratives rooted in everyday life that subtly highlight deep ethical principles and reflect strong cultural ethos. Their works, while seemingly straightforward, offer rich layers of moral teaching and reflection on human behavior.

This paper seeks to analyze the essence of ethos and ethics in the selected works of these two writers and understand how their writings continue to inspire generations with their moral clarity and cultural depth.

Understanding Ethos and Ethics in Literature

Ethos refers to the spirit, moral character, or guiding beliefs of a person, community, or culture, often revealed through literature. Ethics, on the other hand, deals with moral principles that govern behavior. In literary works, ethos shapes the characters' motivations and decisions, while ethical dilemmas and resolutions drive the narrative forward. Through ethos and ethics, authors not only entertain but also educate, offering subtle (or direct) commentary on the right ways to live and relate to others.

Both Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy employ these elements organically. Their stories are not sermons but simple narratives where the goodness of human beings, the beauty of nature, honesty, compassion, humility, and respect for relationships shine through.

Ethos and Ethics in the Works of Ruskin Bond:

Ruskin Bond's literary universe is deeply rooted in ethos;the characteristic spirit, values, and beliefs of Indian hill culture and a quiet, yet consistent exploration of ethics, often through subtle moral lessons embedded in everyday stories. His writing reflects a gentle humanism, love for nature, and a sense of belonging, all underlined by ethical values such as empathy,

honesty, simplicity, and respect for life. Despite being of British Descent Bond embraces Indian Values, portraying a deep connection to Indian Soil, traditions and people.

Celebration of Innocence and Simplicity

In stories like *The Blue Umbrella* and *The Thief* and *The Night Train at Deoli*, Bond portrays the innocence of rural life, the ethical growth of young characters, emotional sensitivity and moral growth. Binya, the protagonist of *The Blue Umbrella*, displays kindness and generosity by gifting her prized possession to a remorseful shopkeeper (Bond, *The Blue Umbrella*). Similarly, the young thief in *The Thief* learns honesty and self-respect under the guidance of a kind-hearted employer (Bond, *Collected Short Stories*). In *The Night Train at Deoli*, innocence is portrayed through the unnamed narrator's tender fascination with the girl selling baskets. His shy glances, unspoken feelings, and quiet longing reflect a youthful purity and emotional honesty. The girl's simple presence and their silent connection embody the fleeting, innocent nature of first love. Bond's ethos revolves around valuing simplicity, forgiveness, and personal growth, even after mistakes.

Deep Connection with Nature

Bond's works frequently depict nature not just as a setting but as a moral force. In *Rain in the Mountains*, he evokes a deep respect for the environment, emphasizing harmonious living with the natural world. Bond reflects on the rhythm of hill life and the quiet companionship of trees, birds, and the changing seasons, showcasing his reverence for nature's simplicity and beauty. In *The Cherry Tree*, he portrays a young boy's joy in nurturing a small plant, symbolizing growth, patience, and harmony with the environment. Similarly, in *The Panther's Moon*, animals and forests are depicted with empathy, highlighting coexistence rather than dominance. Bond's narratives often focus on the sensory experiences of the hills, misty mornings, rustling leaves, and monsoon rains, drawing readers into a world where nature offers peace, wisdom, and moral grounding. Through these works, he subtly advocates for environmental respect and a return to simpler, nature-connected living.

Human Relationships and Compassion

Characters in Bond's stories exhibit genuine affection, respect, and empathy. In *A Flight of Pigeons*, although set against the backdrop of the 1857 revolt, Bond presents complex human emotions that transcend violence and hatred. Compassion triumphs over political and religious divisions, showcasing the human ethos of understanding and reconciliation. His stories often highlight simple yet profound bonds between strangers, friends, or family members that reveal the beauty of kindness and understanding. In *The Night Train at Deoli*, the narrator's silent affection shows emotional sensitivity, while in *The Blue Umbrella*, Binya's act of forgiveness reflects deep compassion. Bond's characters may be ordinary, but their acts of empathy make them memorable, underscoring his belief in the quiet strength of human connection.

Ethos and Ethics in the Works of Sudha Murthy

Moral Education through Storytelling

Sudha Murthy's works are a powerful medium of imparting moral education through simple, relatable storytelling. Her narratives are often drawn from real-life experiences, rural India, and personal encounters, which she uses effectively to communicate ethical values without being preachy. Each story carries a moral lesson that is woven seamlessly into the plot, making it easy for readers, especially younger audiences, to internalize values such as honesty, kindness, humility, and social responsibility. Her short stories, such as those in *Wise and Otherwise* and

The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk, narrate real-life incidents highlighting human virtues and vices, teaching lessons about honesty, gratitude, compassion, and resilience (Murthy, Wise and Otherwise).

Murthy's ethos is grounded in lived experiences, making her moral lessons relatable and authentic.

Upliftment of the Underprivileged

Sudha Murthy's literary and philanthropic works both reflect a deep commitment to the upliftment of the underprivileged. Through her stories, she gives voice to those who are often overlooked rural women, laborers, orphans, and the economically weak. Her narratives highlight the dignity, resilience, and potential within marginalized communities, showing how small acts of kindness and access to education can transform lives. In books like *Three Thousand Stitches*, she recounts her work with former devadasis, helping them rebuild their lives with self-respect and financial independence. She emphasizes that empowerment begins with empathy and opportunity. Similarly, in *Wise and Otherwise*, Murthy shares real-life stories where simple gestures like funding a child's education or supporting a small business create ripple effects of change.

Her stories consistently advocate for inclusion, equal opportunity, and the idea that true progress lies in lifting the weakest sections of society. Murthy's work with the Infosys Foundation further grounds her stories in truth, making them both inspiring and instructive. By blending storytelling with social awareness, she not only narrates change but also motivates readers to become agents of change themselves. Through her compassionate lens, Sudha Murthy redefines success as the ability to uplift others. She advocates social justice, kindness, and service to humanity.

Importance of Humility and Simplicity

In Sudha Murthy's works, humility and simplicity are portrayed as the core virtues that define truly admirable individuals. Her characters, often from modest backgrounds, exhibit quiet strength and moral clarity without seeking recognition. In *Wise and Otherwise*, she contrasts the arrogance of the educated elite with the wisdom of the humble poor, showing that true worth lies in character, not status. Her own narrative voice is simple and unpretentious, reflecting the very values she promotes. Through real-life stories and folklore, Murthy emphasizes that humility and simplicity lead to inner peace, respect, and lasting impact. Despite her immense personal achievements, Sudha Murthy's writings, such as *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, reflect a consistent ethos of humility, gratitude, and respect for learning (Murthy, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*). She portrays ethical behavior as rooted in humility—the willingness to learn from anyone and to appreciate the smallest blessings in life.

Comparative Insights: Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy

Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy, though different in style and background, both reflect a strong essence of ethos and ethics in their works. Bond's ethos is rooted in the natural world and personal relationships, where ethics unfold subtly through introspection, innocence, and quiet moral choices. His stories like *The Blue Umbrella*, *The Thief*, *Room on the Roof*, *Vagarants In The Valley* and *The Night Train at Deoli* highlight compassion, forgiveness, and emotional honesty without overt lessons. In contrast, Sudha Murthy's ethos is shaped by Indian traditions, social realities, and cultural values. Her stories, such as those in *Wise and Otherwise*, *How I*

Taught My Grandmother To Read or Three Thousand Stitches, focus on moral education, social justice, and the transformative power of kindness and humility. She uses direct, real-life narratives to teach ethical behavior, especially emphasizing honesty, service, and empathy. While Bond presents ethics through poetic reflection, Murthy delivers them through purposeful storytelling, making both writers valuable contributors to the moral fabric of Indian literature. Though different in style and background Bond's being more nostalgic and lyrical, Murthy's being more anecdotal and direct both authors share a commitment to portraying goodness, moral growth, and ethical living. Both authors believe in the inherent goodness of people and emphasize that small acts of kindness, forgiveness, and understanding build a better society.

Conclusion

The literary landscapes created by Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy are rich with the essence of ethos and ethics. Bond uses subtle, aesthetic storytelling, drawing ethos from nature and human emotion. Sudha Murthy adopts a more grounded socially conscious approach, deriving ethos from Indian Tradition and everyday heroism. Their stories, simple yet profound, remind readers of the timeless values that sustain human societies, compassion, humility, honesty, forgiveness, and respect for all beings. In a world grappling with moral ambiguities and ethical dilemmas, their works offer refreshing clarity. Through their narratives, Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy teach that goodness is not found in grand heroic gestures but in the small, everyday choices we make. Together, they offer complementary visions of Indian ethics- one introspective and poetic while the other practical and socially engaged. Their contribution to Indian-English literature thus stands as a testament to the enduring power of ethical storytelling.

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