

*Review*

## Speciality of Ruskin Bond's Writings

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Ruskin Bond is considered to be an icon among Indian writers and children's authors. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 for contributions to children's literature. Ruskin Bond was born towards the end of the British Raj, a somewhat lonely childhood, marked by his parents' divorce and his mother's remarriage. India gets an exquisite reflection in his stores. This paper intends to look at him more closely. His works are highly approved by society at large. His stories are very famous and he writes in an extremely enjoyable language and style which even holds a child throughout the entire narrative. This is not the sole point to entertain. His approach to his child characters, their activities, desire, feeling, and he like win our favour. Most of his novellas and short stories hide a fervent quest for identity, the concerns of which are historically and culturally inflected. Ruskin Bond is thus, in no way inferior to any of his contemporaries. His works are neither ambiguous nor theoretical.

**Key words:** Indian writer, narrative, entertain.

### INTRODUCTION

Stories are something that almost every child likes, and books are something most children today detest. In India, a child is very often introduced to the world of stories by his/her immediate relatives. They often narrate fairy tales and popular stories from the Panchatantra and the Jatakatales, especially at bed time. Such stories not only send children to a world full of fantasy and magic, but also often have a moral to teach in the end. When children grow older, they reach out for more stories, and in many cases, the relatives run out of them. At this point, come to the rescue, a group of writers, who cater to the needs and expectations of the children. Since most children do not like sitting in a corner, reading a book and since many of them do not have the attention span to read an exhaustingly long book, fiction written specifically for children often comprises short narratives,

depending upon the age group of the intended readers. Also, the language of such books tends to be very interesting and humorous, but not necessarily 'simple'.

In India, many middle class urban children start out reading fairy tales and go on to read books like Charlie And The Chocolate Factory, Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Series Of Unfortunate Events, Goosebumps, The Famous Five, Harry Potter, Artemis Fowl and so on. Many of the books that such children in India read are written by authors from the west. A probable reason for this could be the fact that very few authors in India who write exclusively for children are well marketed. A lot of children and their parents are not even aware of these authors and of their books' existence. The focus of the media and most schools in India is on literature for children coming from the west. A lot of parents also insist

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that their children should read books written by Britons because they feel the language and grammar will be correct, as they follow the so-called 'Queen's English'. A lot of children prefer too American and British fiction series like Nancy Drew and Harry Potter either because they are popular among their friends and as a result play an important role in maintaining their levels of social acceptance in their peer group or because through these books, they learn something about a different culture. Among the very few Indian authors in English who are marketed well by the media, are encouraged by schools and parents and any layman is aware of Ruskin Bond. His stories are very famous and he writes in an extremely enjoyable language and style which even holds a child throughout the entire narrative.

Bond claims that India is his home. He states that he is drawn to India because of the atmosphere—the diversity that has mingled to produce a unique place. He was born in India, his mother's family has been in India for two generations, and his father was born, lived, and worked in India. According to Bond, his mother's family are descendants of Timur the Lame. In an article, Bond writes: "Race did not make me an Indian. But history did. And in the long run it is history that counts."

Bond has always been interested in books of all types. Some of his favorite authors

include Rumer Godden, Emily Bronte, T. E. Lawrence, Rudyard Kipling, and Tagore. His love of books was inspired by his father and cemented by loneliness when his father died.

According to Bond, books were the great escape. Books became like friends and provided the comfort that he needed during the most difficult times of his young life. Bond started his writing career at a young age by keeping journals that would eventually form the basis of his first novel *Room on the Roof* published in 1956 and went on to win the *John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize*. The book was written during his time in London while he was experiencing strong feelings of longing and homesickness for his familiar surrounding and friends in India and is based largely on real life characters and incidents from his journals. This makes his early efforts unique, the works of an adolescent living and growing up in India during the colonial and post colonial era.

Bond has written over 100 short stories and two autobiographies. The first, *Scenes from a Writer's Life*, covers roughly the first twenty-one years of his life and the second book, *The Lamp is Lit*, picks up when Bond returned to India after a two-year stay in England.

Although Ruskin Bond was basically from England and his forefathers were British, he always missed India and the friends at Dehra. In his autobiography, *Scenes from a Writer's Life*, reveal his longing for the atmosphere of India:

*"...even though my forefathers were British, Britain was not really my place. I did not belong to the bright lights of Piccadilly and*

*Leicester Square; or, for that matter, to the apple orchards of Kent or the strawberry fields of Berkshire. I belonged, very firmly, to peepal trees and mango groves; to sleepy little towns all over India; to hot sunshine, muddy canals, the pungent smell of marigolds; the hills of home; spicy odours, wet earth after summer rain, neem pods bursting; laughing brown faces; and the intimacy of human contact".* (Bond, 1997, pp. 154-155)

Ruskin Bond writes that his autobiographical work *The Lamp is Lit: Leaves from a Journal*, a collection of essays, episodes, and journal entries, is a celebration of his survival as a freelance—this survival being as much the result of his stubbornness. He explains:

*"At twenty I was a published author, although not many people had heard of me! And although I wasn't making much money then, and probably never would, it was the general consensus among my friends that I was an impractical sort of fellow and that I would be wise to stick to the only thing that I could do fairly well—putting pen to paper".* (Bond, 1998, p. 13).

A few mentions are also made in his work about modernization. In his autobiography,

*The Lamp is Lit*, Bond discusses how in the 1940s most of the traffic going to Mussoorie consisted of bullock carts carrying sugar cane. Now, the sugar cane is carried in trucks. He states that we should not grumble too much because it helps the economy.

Ruskin Bond wrote in the light of his own experience of life and he found impressions about thing and peoples which had an ordinary effect on him and it was reflected in his work. He was sober by temperament that has an effect on his life style. He was polite and highly adjustable personality like his father. The sadness and love of solitude that was part of his existence and also lack of resources did not allow him to get married and lead a happy life.

Ruskin Bond was a voracious reader, because his father introduced him to the wondrous world through books and thus he made reading his religion. He read fifteen thousand books during his school days and then he started his career as a writer. He says:

*"The school library, The Anderson Library was fairly well stocked and it was something of a heaven for me over the next three years. There were always writers past or present, to discover and I still have a tendency to ferret out writers, who have been ignored or forgotten."*<sup>3</sup>

Ruskin's love for his maid is also retold in the short story "My First Love," where a maid is the mother figure who takes care of his physical needs, and comforts him when he is afraid at night, entertains him with fairy tales of princes, gardens, and palaces. His parents' marital

troubles and his father's pain and loneliness had a lasting effect on the shy and sensitive Ruskin Bond, an effect that has influenced his attitude toward life and his writing. He takes up serious themes for his stories but they are not dull, because he makes them interesting to attract the common reader. His focus of attention is the poor middle class men and women who follow their own way of life. He writes about baggers, villagers and yet they have their point of honour which authors have generally reveals through his works. Ruskin Bond thinks that even a rogue has his point of honour as a virtuous person has his point of dishonour. He therefore loves mankind. He wrote about every part of life. From childhood to old-age, he wrote about his experience and incidents that he was involved in various times. Ruskin fictionalizes his childhood experiences in the novella *Once upon a Monsoon Time* and the short story "The Room of Many Colours," which is actually the first half of the novella, covering the protagonist's life in Jamnagar. The story reveals an innocent and a charmed view of childhood in which the protagonist is brought by his father, maid, and by a gardener, in the same way as Ruskin Bond was brought up by his father in Jamnagar.

Bond, an apparent idealist, tries to see the best in everything and everyone. A reviewer of his work, Soma Banerjee, states that Bond's works are "internationally acclaimed due to his deep insight into human nature. They reveal his tolerant attitude and warm sympathy for people."

Tales about everyday life are the focus of Bond's work, not social issues. The only social issue he writes about is nature.

Recurring themes in Bonds work include his mother's abandonment, his relationship with his father, crossing boundaries set by society, love of nature, unrequited love, and, to a lesser extent, changes that are occurring in India.

Another common theme in Bond's work is unrequited love. Bond's first real experience with love occurred when he was in England for two years. He fell in love with a Vietnamese girl, Vu Phuong. He describes her as a pretty and soft-spoken girl. They walked hand in hand, and she made tea for him, but unfortunately, she thought of him as a brother and when she returned to Vietnam to visit her family, he never heard from her again. In "Time Stops at Shamli," Bond writes of a young man who meets a girl from his past. He wants to take her away from her dreary life and unhappy marriage. The two lovers talk, kiss, and embrace until he becomes overcome with emotion and tries to convince her to run away with him. He is predictably unsuccessful. She is married and remains "as unattainable as ever."

Other themes that appear less frequently in Bond's work include partition, changes in society, and Hindu traditional life. In his first autobiography, Bond writes about partition.

Bond reflexively uses Hindi words in his writing. In *Time*

*Stops in Shamli*, he uses the term *shikar* (hunter), *gulab* (rose), *hisaab* (days accounts), *maidan* (grounds), and *dhobi* (washer man). His casual use of these words indicates his proficiency with Hindi and ease with Indian culture.

As a writer, Bond does not have a sense of superiority over Indians nor does he apologize to Europeans in his stories. He seems comfortable with both cultures. There is no sense of tension between the two.

Bond's stories are simple ones about everyday life. They are light hearted and humorous. Most of his stories tell how the narrator met a certain character, what they did and speak about and how they parted.

Bond particularly likes to write children's stories. Eminent Indian novelist, Mulk Raj

Anand, suggests that Bond is seeking to recapture through his writing what he missed in life – a happy childhood.

He has always emphasized on the friendly relationship between man and nature and has brought before us our need for each other. That is why we notice his pity for the unsympathetic and cruel actions of human beings towards nature.

Having grown up in the hills, in the lap of nature... in once idyllic Mussourie, Kasauli, Shimla, Dehradun and Jamnagar... no one understands nature like Ruskin Bond and it takes his ability to put this wonder into words. He is indeed nature's favourite child.

He is a painter of words. Bond uses his pen as a brush to paint captivating images of his observations on and his experiences with nature and beckons his readers into his imagination... like the sweet fragrance of a flower in full bloom during spring. A book that relaxes the eyes rests the mind. It is very, very soothing... almost like a lullaby on a hot summer afternoon. While the fragrance of his words... lingers on and on and on.

Ruskin Bond has his modest home miles from the madding crowds in picture-postcard pretty Landour, a quaint little 'town' above Mussoorie. His tiny living room is filled with books, pictures and 'trophies'. The writer's familiar chubby face is now framed by hair that was 'more-salt-less-pepper' and combed neatly, like a schoolboy's. His eyes are sparkling blue, his complexion a healthy pink, and his smile ever so engaging. While, his voice is deep and resonant. Bond has written in almost every genre - short story, novel, poem, travelogue, essay etc... and counts essays and short stories as his favourite forms. Prolific and popular, witty and wise, charming and cherubic, Ruskin Bond commands adulation across regions, age groups and gender. Here is a writer who has defied genres, challenged conventions and remained enduring and endearing down the years... and he believes that in order to become a good writer one has to be confident and perseverant. He says, "At times, when the chips are down and you are disappointed, you have to stick to this. I have seen young people who entered this field, but quit after some time and joined other

creative streams like advertising or journalism. I stick to writing, since I had no other alternative."

In 1992, he received the Sahitya Akademi award for English writing, for his short stories collection, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, by the Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters). He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999, for his life time contribution to Indian literature.

Bond currently lives in Landour, Mussoorie's well-known Ivy Cottage, with his adopted family – Prem and Chandra, their kids Rakesh and Mukesh and their five kids. He visits his brother William in Canada and his sister Ellen who lives with his step-sister Premila in Ludhiana from time to time.

### **Some of his stories made into movie**

Recently, his short story "Susannah's Seven Husbands" is made into movie "Saat Khoon Maaf", directed by Vishal Bharadwaj, which stars Priyanka Chopra. Ruskin Bond is also there in the movie (Cameo).

The other stories which were turned into movies are "Junoon" in 1978 and "Blue Umbrella" in 2007.

Ruskin Bond mesmerizes his readers yet again through his straight from the heart collection of prose and poems. This is his way of expressing his feelings for his beloved adopted country with all her animate and inanimate beings, their uniqueness, their character and how all

these combine to create a unique flavour of Indian-ness. In fact Ruskin Bond is living legend who has been portraying life and experiences through various genres of literature. Ruskin Bond has contributed in making three generations of Indian school children into readers. His short- stories, poem and essays- even those written forty or fifty years back- are widely authorized in school texts, and his books are recommended for reading in many schools throughout the country where English is the medium of communication.

### **Conflict of Interests**

The author have not declared any conflict of interests

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