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RUSKIN BOND'S SHORT STORIES: A THEMATIC STUDY

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Abstract:

From the groovy hills of Mussoorie two watchful eyes have been observing everyday little events to make them a big reason for many famous literary writings. These are the eyes of an ordinary looking man, always lost in his imaginations. In spite of having an absent-minded attitude, he provided entertainment to children and grown-ups as well. Many people travel up to the hills of Mussoorie just to have a look at him. He actually has become a celebrity for a large number of his readers. Although he has name, fame, popularity and establishment in the world of Indian-English literature but he prefers to a life of person, devoted to nature thoroughly. He is Ruskin Bond, who was born in Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh) in 1934, spent his life in Jamnagar (Gujrat), Dheradun and Shimla. In the complete span of his career, he has written over a hundred short stories, essays, novels and more than thirty books for children. He is a long term resident of Landour in Mussoorie (in the Himalyan mountains in India), famous for his poetry, fiction and weekly English language-articles in leading Indian newspapers. Land-ours is actually considered as a place where Mussoorie's most popular resident stay. He has a 1960 Olympia typewriter about which he says. "I never really took to the computer, I don't think I can work on it the way I do with a pen in hand, it is like my old school boy habit. I write more with pen."

Keywords: *Adventure, Exploring, Alienation, Loneliness, Homelessness, Relationships, Infatuation, Friendship, Family, Separation, etc.*

His bio-data simply goes as, he was born in Kasauli, small boy in Jamnagar, bigger boy in Dehradun, schoolboy in Simla, sundry adventures in Agra, Ambala and Rishikesh and now holed up in Mussoorie.

At the age of seventeen he went to stay in Jersey in the Channel Islands. In his first job he worked as a junior clerk in a solicitor's office. After sometime he left the job and started working in a popular travel agency, which was looking forward to open a branch-office in Jersey. Bond had been proved a clumsy workman as he was completely inexperienced in this work. In his third job, he had to carry pay-packets down to workers in the Island's ancient sewers. But the circumstances forced his way again into India. Then he realized he had done enough useless work and now he would start his livelihood with freelance writing.

Then he started giving shocks to every newspaper and magazines with his wonderful articles, essays, stories and even poems. Those days there was a real lack of book publishers, that's why few people could really concentrate on journalism. Things started improving a little. Bond got opportunities to write for 'The Asia Magazine' in Hong-Kong, 'Blackwood' in Edinburg and 'The Christian Science Monitor' in Boston. Before it he got his articles published in 'The Statesman,' 'The Illustrated Weekly', 'Mother India', 'The Tribune of Ambala', 'The Leader of Allahabad', 'Shankar's weekly', and 'The Hindu Sports and Pastime'. Payments were not more than fifty rupees per article.



The age of seventeen was of an outstanding significance for the writer as he had published his first book, was full of hopes and ambitions, every time prepared to take risks. And like every other person he too considered himself a great lover.

At this age he wrote his first novel *The Room on the Roof*. The most fortunate thing about the writer is that at the very beginning of his literary career, this novella was given the 'John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize' for young writers in 1957.

The early stories were written in Dehradun, when he was struggling to manage a livelihood in the form of a freelance writer. In 1960's, after a span of office work in Delhi, he moved to a hill-station, Mussoorie and many stories written in this duration were the pure character studies of people. 'The longing after something lost' has been a dominant theme of his stories. In 1970's when he found himself tortured down by both the personal and professional problems, he moved on to writing for children and found a way out of his difficulties. The writer has a strong ability to enter into the minds of children, while writing for them.

Around 1986 the time was quite bad for Ruskin Bond, who had been using his pen, typewriter, papers etc. for over thirty years without achieving anything even critical approval. He was admitted to a hospital in Mussoorie, recovering from duodenal ulcer, hemorrhoids and a bladder infection. A month had passed and the hospital bill was going to exceed than author's bank-balance. Suddenly one day what he saw was a letter, placed on his table. It was fortunately from David Davidar, who had recently started editing and publishing Penguin Books in India. Now the author started feeling a little better. The author remembered that there was an old copy of *The Room on the Roof*, lying around somewhere in his home that he looked forward to get published. After that David included him honourably among the most popular authors.

He had faced a number of hard moments in his life. An example is when his *The Sensualist* first appeared in 'Debonair,' the Bombay magazine. One unfortunate day a policeman had reached before him with an obscenity charge and non-bailable warrant, but a sympathetic Mussoorie SDM granted him a bail, using his directions. The case got extended upto a couple of years, but in such a tough time some great writers like Nissim Ezekiel and Vijay Tendulkar supported him in court, and consequently the author got an honourable acquittal.

First two decades of his life are of great importance, and are called the formative years of his life. He had been quite optimistic throughout, in spite of all the struggles, failures and harsh experiences. He recalls those significant years:

Simla, his father used to send him a feast of inspiring letters. His father used to tell him a number of stories about phantom, rickshaw pullers, enchanted forest and hills and in such a way he generated a love for fiction in his heart. Through his father he came to know a lot about many famous writers such as Kipling, his stories, settings, characters etc. His father, we can say had been through thick and thin with him as long as he could and was proved a strong stand-by for his loving son.

Bond was too young to understand the complexities of relationship (separation of parents). This unusual childhood made him quite introvert, in fact a premature adult. Except for his domestic life he did not have very good memories of his school days. He did not like the attitude of school teachers. He had a peculiar sense of insecurity. He did not like the company of other fun loving boys. He can never forget the day when one of his school teachers Mr. Murtough gave him the information about his father's demise in very ridiculous words like God needed his father more than he himself did. Ruskin Bond became puzzled why God had taken his father away from him, knowing that he was the only person to look him after.

To conclude, in each of Bond's children stories, the protagonists have an identity, completeness and freedom to take decisions. They have a kind of openness of heart and mind. They don't like to stay within the confinements made by their elders. They just want to cross every barrier laid down by the



elders. They have their own world, their own principles to lead the life, their own manners and methods, their own way of thinking. They want nothing but space. They long to see the life, visit the world, interact with people and falsify their elders saying that they are kids. They all are a little mature, responsible and sincere for life. The story *The Flute Player*, is an account of the restlessness, that takes place in the heart of a girl Kamla who comes from England to Jaipur to visit her grandparents, where she meets an innocent village boy Roni, who swims in the canal, being overjoyed on playing melodies upon his flute. This is altogether a new thing and experience for Kamla. She gets thrilled and excited. A different vision of 'home' strikes her little mind.

In the novel "The Room on the Roof," there is an urge inside the protagonist Rusty to break his loneliness. He never wants to be isolated, inaccessible and out of the arena of the common people and this irritation and restlessness make him revolutionary. And an opportunity he gets when Mr. Harrison his guardian goes to Delhi : Rusty intended making the most of his guardian's absence; he would squeeze all the freedom he could out of the next few days; explore, get lost, wander afar; even if it were only to find new places to dream in. So he threw himself on the bed and visualized the tomorrow...where should he go into the hills again into the forest? Or should he listen to the devil in his heart and go into the bazaar? Tomorrow he would know, tomorrow.

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