

# 3.1. THE ROOM ON THE ROOF: Novel of adolescence.

The novel *The Room on the Roof* is a significant work as it was written by an adolescent about the life of adolescents in India. No wonder it won the prestigious award for fiction. It has all the ingredients of a good novel with a well-crafted plot with the characters drawn from real life. It is authentic and honest to the core. Though a maiden attempt, it has been edited and worked on by experienced editor and his mentor Diana Athill, who wrote in her letter to the author, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1964,

"The Room on the Roof remains just what it always was, a remarkably true piece of writing. You are a writer who works best from very close to your own experience--. I sometimes feel envious of people with the other kind of mind, full of invention. But I still like best the kind of writing which goes inwards rather than outwards." (reproduced in Scenes from Writer's Life).

The author, a young boy of 17, went to England in search of a job. Born and brought up in India, he felt a deep sense of longing for the country of his birth. He realized that he belonged to India and he loved it. His sense of alienation and homesickness made him write the novel. The characters are his childhood friends with whom he had shared the little joy and sorrow of life in India.

The novel is about his life in India as an adolescent. The style is comparable to an impressionistic painting. The theme is close to his heart and true to his life experiences. Set in the post independent Dehra Dun it recreates the romance of the period seen through the impressionistic eyes of young boy Rusty. It is a celebration of life. The age of the author and Rusty the adolescent being same, with its heady blend of adventure and innocence the novel evokes magical charm. It is an age full of hope and dreams. Death, change and trauma fail to stop the fountain of life and the characters continue their journey unabated.

The quintessence of the novel *The Room on the Roof* is life and its different shapes. Rusty the Anglo-Indian boy who inherits the twin culture is being brought up by his Anglo-Indian guardian. He finds the discipline of his household and neighborhood constricting. He feels suffocated and leaves the safety of his home to explore the outside world. His chance encounter with the local boys opens a new window to the outside world. Being a lonely child he is hungry for companionship. As rebellious teenager he ventures out and when his guardian Mr. Harrison tries to stop him by punishing, he runs away. Like any other teenager of his age he walks out of the home simply to be away from the authority of the elders.

The *chai* shop in the bazaar provides the right type of setting for this newly found freedom. His friends introduce him to the tangy golgappas and he takes an instant liking for them.

The cultural shock and the thrill of rustic holi celebrations are vividly described. It also depicts the conflict between the

sophisticated Anglo-Indian sensibility of his guardian getting a rude shock and the young boy with a fresh mind, finding it as a challenge that is pleasant and enjoyable. The boy is absolutely overwhelmed. The outside world is like a wonderland for the boy. He joins his friends to take bath in the public tap. The joy and the exuberance, the warmth and the freedom brings with it the bonds of friendship with his street smart friends Romi and Ranbir. The description of the Dehra bazaar is interesting.

Rusty encounters everything that is new to him. He is learning his daily lessons of life from Dehra. His friends Somi and Ranbir introduce him to a new and lively ways of living. They represent a new zest for life. The warmth of friendship and the endearing hospitality makes Rusty take an instant liking for Somi. As a friend in need, Somi finds a job of tutor for Kapoor's son Kishen. Rusty, during his stay in their house develops a liking for Mrs. Kapoor. As true to his age, he derives tremendous joy in being close to the lady during the picnic. He expresses his love for her and the lady consents. Mrs. Kapoor, a young lady married to alcoholic husband basks in the adoration of a teenaged boy. It satisfies her hunger for recognition and love.

The author, himself an adolescent, depicts the feelings in the most natural manner. But as life is not just a fantasy, Rusty is forced soon enough to realize the reality. Mrs. Kapoor dies in a car accident. Faced with the dark reality of life, the young adolescent is dumb founded. "Rusty was overcome by a feeling of impotence and futility

and of unimportance of life. Every moment, he told himself, some one is born and someone dies, you can count them one, two three, a birth and a death for every moment. What is this one life in the whole pattern of life? What is this one life, but a passing of time? And if I were to die now suddenly and without cause what would happen? Would it matter? We live without knowing why, and to what purpose."2

The separation which is painful for the sensitive adolescent mind continues when his close friends Ranbir and Suri leave and Somi is about to go to Amritsar. Once again Rusty is alone. Finally he decides to leave Dehra and India, may be in an attempt to go as far away as possible from the painful memory of Meena's death. Kishen leaves for Haridwar.

At Haridwar, Rusty finds himself face to face with another set of reality of life, as he goes there to take leave of Kishen before leaving for England. He finds Meena's husband happily married and living with his second wife and his friend turned into a tramp. Kishen finds it difficult to reconcile to his father's second marriage and disowns him by running away from home. He turns himself into a notorious thief. This concept of self destruction or hurting oneself is the most common phenomena during the adolescent period. The young mind is neither a child's mind which forgets easily, nor an adult's mind which can forgive. So caught in between is the stage of adolescence. Here the child can understand and feel. But he is not adult enough to

understand and forgive. That is the reason why the rebellion takes place. It is an expression of disbelief, disenchantment of the adult world, which is shocking for the adolescent. At this stage an adolescent without the proper guidance of the grown up, gets totally confused and reacts in a violent way.

Here Kishen could not forgive his father who married again. The sudden loss of his mother is shocking enough for him. His father's need for a companion leading to the marriage is another blow. To the sensitive mind of adolescent, it is a betrayal and a loss of his father's affection. Kishen has only one way of expressing it. It is by inducing pain to himself, thereby punishing his father. By being a thief or a pickpocket he is disobeying his father and causing pain by doing something which he does not want him to do.

Every protagonist in Ruskin Bond's fiction undergoes this stage. Rusty also rebels and runs away from home. The day he runs away from home he has no other intention but to cause anxiety to his guardian and his choice of staying away from home is an instantaneous decision and not a pre-planned one. In the similar manner when Rusty meets Kishen, he finds him in a state of shock. Initially Kishen tries to stay away. But Rusty's warmth of friendship breaks the ice and they come together.

Once again it is the peer group, which plays an important role in an adolescent's life. Kishen and Rusty decide to return to Dehra as "They were both refugees- refugees for the world... they were each other's shelter, each other's refuge, each other's help. Kishen was a jungli, divorced from rest of mankind and Rusty was the only one who understood him – because Rusty too was divorced from mankind. And theirs was a tie that would hold, because they were the only people who knew each other and loved each other."

The process of coming together starts with Rusty and Kishen's return to Dehra. There is the hope of re-union, suggested in a letter from Somi.

"I shall be coming back to Dehra in the spring in time to watch you play holi with Ranbir. Wait a little; be patient and the bad days will pass. We do not know why we live. It is no use trying to know. But we have to live. Rusty, because we really want to and as long as we want to, we have got to find something to live for and even die for it."

Ruskin Bond speaks of the average adolescent here. It is how a young mind perceives the happenings around and responds. The adolescents are vibrant, full of life and want to live and die for something or somebody. Their love or hate is so passionate and intense that they are prepared to live or die for it. They live in the moment and act or react for that moment of their life.

However the spring of hope is always present in an adolescent's life.

"One day you will be great Rusty. A writer or an actor or a

prime-minister or something.. may be a poet! Why not a poet Rusty?"

Rusty smiled, he knew he was smiling because he was smiling at himself.

"Yes" he said 'why not a poet?" so they began to walk. Ahead of them lay forest and silence... and what was left of time."

The Room on the Roof has the elements of allegory of life. It depicts the cycle of hope and despair, darker and brighter aspects of life. It has a pattern; the friends come together in a vibrant and colorful festival of Holi. They separate and suffer. Finally there is again a hope of re-union in which the colorful festival of Holi is mentioned as a meeting place.

Secondly the novel is set in Dehra Dun. But for the last three chapters, the entire novel is about life in Dehra. Hence it pays a specific homage to Dehra, a place dear to the author's heart.

So far as the structure is concerned *The Room on The Roof* is a well-planned novel, dealing with the theme of adolescence. It can be divided into four acts as the drama unfolds in four dimensions of adolescent's behaviour.

Rebellion: The first seven chapters give a vibrant picture of Dehra bazaar that is full of life and color. It is wild, dusty and full of people and sweetmeat. On the other hand there is life in Harrison household, disciplined, serious and dull. The bazaar is a prohibited area for the Harrison household. Obviously the

young adolescent finds the bazaar more attractive for the very reason that it is prohibited. This restriction and desire to break it, adds luster to the bazaar. When pushed to edge the teenager rebels violently.

"Mad with the pain in his own face, Rusty hit the man again and again, wildly and awkwardly but with the giddy thrill of knowing, he could do it: he was a child no longer, he was nearly seventeen. He was a man." He runs away in a state of shock and confusion, in a state of total disarray. He sits on the steps of the *chaat* shop, in the middle of the night. Rusty's predicament is described in the following passage.

"Rusty had not fully realized the hazards of the situation.

He was still mad with anger and rebellion, and though the blood on his cheek had dried, his face was still smarting. He could not think clearly; the present was confusing and unreal and he could not see beyond it".

Infatuation: In the next seven chapters there is a transition from the dull and drab Harrison household to the gaiety of the bazaar. Rusty moves into the household of Kapoors. The movez ment is not only physical but also psychological. He moves from the innocent childhood to the romantic adolescence. The climax is set very appropriately in a forest. Ruskin Bond believes in the charm or spell that the nature casts on the minds of humans. Hence almost all his romantic endeavors take

place in the open. Meena introduces the child to the adult world. The infatuation or the crush over Meena may be termed as calf-love. It is romantic and fascinating for Rusty.

3) Identity Crisis: Meena's sudden death comes as a rude shock to the boy. Now he is faced with another reality of life-death, soon after he discovers the treasure of life – love. It becomes difficult for the young mind to accept this. It pushes him into gloomy introspective period. In the sequence of five chapters Rusty is engrossed in his own thoughts and spends his time confined to his 'room on the roof'.

The allegory of life can also be related to the title. Rusty spends most of his time contemplating about death, sitting in his room on the roof. Above the reality of life is death. People live in their houses close to the earth – they move, love and fight. But in Rusty's room above, there is his encounter with the higher realities – death, suffering and above all his loneliness. His companions are visitors from the world of nature and not from the world of humans. His window opens and offers a view of nature, serene and blissful. It is this nature, which is soothing and comforting. He comes back to this room in the end. It is always there for him. It is symbolic.

4) <u>Friendship</u>: The last four chapters show Rusty meeting another reality of life. He goes in search of his friend whom he finds running away from the family. Initially he tries to

avoid Rusty. But Rusty wins his faith and helps him to cope with the trauma. Their friendship and love act as an elixir of life for Kishen. They decide to go back to Dehra, the place that they deeply loved. It is a symbol of their faith in life. They 'go back to it' as Bond puts it.

"They had to go back: to bathe at the water tank and listen to the morning gossip, to sit under the fruit trees and eat in the *chaat* shop and perhaps make a garden on the roof; to eat and sleep; to work; to live; to die."

The Room on the Roof is an intensely personal novel. It is a product of a sense of alienation of the author who was in a sort of exile, away from his favorite Dehra and India. As a 17-year-old teenager he was in search of his identity. Faced with the duality of being born as a child of English parents in India and brought up in the lap of the Himalayas he faced a dilemma. When he went to England at this stage, he did not feel at home. He felt home sick. He realized that he had his roots in India. Going home to England aggravated the post-colonial trauma of displacement, loss of family and friends and insecurity. Born and brought up in India like an average Indian child, he had very little in common with the Englishman.

While working on the novel *The Room on the Roof* he explored his own consciousness, trying to find an answer to his identity crisis. It helped him to recognize and understand his needs and identify

his roots. He found himself an Indian and returned to India, to the foothills of the Himalayas, a place he really belonged to.

First and foremost *The Room on the Roof* is an adolescent novel. This area of writing for adolescents was not yet recognized when it was first published in 1956. The first edition was described as an adult novel written by a teenager. The 1993 Penguin edition calls it "a novel of adolescence". Being an adolescent who is no more a child and not yet not an adult, the individual faces a crisis in his personality. As Psychologist, Reed Artha J S puts it "the young adults experience isolation, socialization, confusion and rebellion".7.

It is a crucial period in the life of an individual. The adolescents make important decisions and form their own ideas about the future which affects their life as adults in the later stage.

"Adolescence is the transitional period from the dependency of childhood to the independence and responsibility of being an adult. At this point in their lives young people struggle with two fundamental problems; to redefine their relationship with parents and other adults and to establish themselves as individual."

# The autobiographical element:

The novel, being intensely autobiographical, deals with the adolescent themes with depth and authenticity. Rusty, the protagonist is an Anglo-Indian like the author, orphaned at a young age (Ruskin lost his father at an early age.) Rusty is brought up by his guardian

Mr. Harrison (Ruskin Bond's stepfather's name is Mr.Hari.) The small community of Anglo-Indians continues to live a life of luxury and a life-style entirely isolated from the rest of the Indian world.

Rusty is a lonely and shy boy. He has no friends. He is forbidden to go beyond the clock tower, into the bazaar. He often finds relief and escape from his confined world through dreams of "sudden and perfect companionship, romance and heroics." <sup>9</sup>

Rusty like the author, finds solace in lonely walks in the mountain roads. At a turning point he is offered a ride on the bicycle by a Sikh boy Somi, who is also a teenager. Initially he is casual and shy. The disarmingly simple and rustic Somi attracts him.

The journey motif in the form of an adolescent's search for identity can also be related here to the act of Rusty who defies his guardian's instructions and moves to the world of the bazaar. The journey begins from this point in the novel. The archetypal epic hero who sets on a journey typifies the individual, as per the psychologists like Jung, "is endeavoring to discover and assert his personality." <sup>10</sup>

"Rusty moved along with the crowd fascinated by the sight of beggars lying on the roadside, naked and emaciated half-humans, some skeletons, some covered with sores; old men dying, children dying, mothers with suckling babies living and dying." 11

It may be noted here that Rusty returns to his guardian's home twice, after the initial wandering away. On his first straying away he gets a scolding and punishment by caning. The second transgression takes place when he takes part in the Holi-festival. A festival of colors symbolizing spring and regeneration. He is instantly attracted to the rhythm of the beating drums and the wild abandon "Something wild and emotional, something that belonged to his dream world."<sup>12</sup>

Even after this he returns home. He gets beaten up. It is interesting to note that the child in him goes back to the home for shelter twice. He endures the physical torture. But when his guardian taunts him of his being a 'half-breed' that had been hidden from him so far amounting to an attack on his identity and the root of his own existence, he reacts violently, beats his guardian and runs away, even though 'madness and violence and freedom were new to him.' He is under shock. Here the traumatized teenager is pushed to the edge and as a result he rebels. It is this disillusionment and lack of love and care that drives him out of his house. At the same time the new found faith and the warmth of friendship and freedom gives him the strength to cross the threshold to empower himself, to take responsibility for his life and actions.

It has an epic structure. The hero responds to the call of adventure and is guided by the minstrels. They are symbols of the whole psyche. Here Rusty's friends guide him and accompany him in his journey. They are at times his alter ego. When he walks out of his so called home, he walks straight into the arms of his friends. He becomes an English teacher to Kishen, son of Mr. And Mrs. Kapoor.

His journey begins here. He becomes a member of the Kapoor family. He gets a room of his own, symbolically a space for himself in the world. His stay in Kapoor's house opens a new road full of affection and unconditional love. This is something new to him. He learns about relationships which gives him a sense of security.

It is a psychological journey which is, according to psychologists "the development of the individual's ego consciousness – his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses – in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him."<sup>13</sup>

The powerful bond of friendship works as a strengthening force for Rusty. A shy and withdrawn teenager grows into a confident and caring individual. It shapes his character and emboldens him into taking responsibility for others. "By crossing social, cultural and economic barriers Rusty acquires humaneness and relates to people who are different from himself."<sup>14</sup>

Ruskin Bond also addresses the sensitive topic of the emerging sexuality of teenagers, (which was neglected during the 1950s) with seriousness and candor. The Room on the Roof describes Rusty's passion and adoration for Mrs. Meena Kapoor. She is the mother he has never known. Meena responds to his adoration first with motherly affection. Later perhaps because of her frustrated and unhappy life with her alcoholic husband she is flattered by Rusty's attention and responds. According to behavioral psychologists like Freud, Rusty's love for Meena an older woman, is a normal aspect of adolescent

sexuality.

The attraction towards the elderly woman is a reemergence of Oedipal feelings in an adolescent. The teenager vies for affection with his father. He behaves more like his father trying to protect the mother. After the death of Meena Kapoor, Rusty offers to play the father figure to Kishen, her son, in the next novel *Vagrants in the Valley*.

It is also interesting to note how Bond analyses the adolescent's perspective of the adults. This aspect is undermined or overlooked in most of the writings for adolescents. It may be due to the fact that the author here is an adolescent himself, and treats it with sensitivity and understanding. As Nat Hentoff puts it "Remarkably absent from the fiction for the young is any real density of perception of the ways in which they look at and react to the adults with whom they live." 15

Bond exposes the merciless hypocritical adult who exploits and abuses the adolescent children. No wonder his protagonists keep running away most of the time from this selfish, cruel world of adults. They find solace in the peaceful arms of Mother Nature. They feel secure and happy in a forest.

The novel ends with Rusty's decision to go back to his room on the roof in Dehra. His creator, Ruskin Bond also finally discovers his home, thereby resolving his personal crisis of identity. He realizes that he is an Indian and settles down once for all in the lap of the Himalayas. As a first novel, *The Room on the Roof* is the beginning of the author's long journey into the world of adolescent fiction Blending autobiography with fiction; he has developed a unique style of writing. His protagonists are adolescents whom the author understands and treats with sympathy and kindness.

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<sup>2.</sup> Ruskin Bond. The Room on the Roof. Collected Fiction, pp. 632.

<sup>3.</sup> ibid pp. 659.

<sup>4.</sup> i*bid* pp. 644.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5.</sup> i*bid* pp. 660.

<sup>6.</sup> ibid pp. 572.

### 3.2. VAGRANTS IN THE VALLEY: JOURNEY AS A MOTIF.

Vagrants in the Valley is a sequel to The Room on the Roof.

The two characters, Rusty and Kishen continue their journey towards

Dehra and the security of their room on the roof.

The two adolescents are on the road. They are vagrants. They have run away from their homes. Both have a common purpose. They want to be away from their cunning adult relatives. They prefer jungle to a home. But they are not aimless wanderers. They have a goal, a destination. They are moving towards their room on the roof in Dehra. It is a journey towards the security of a room of their own. They have to pass through a jungle, cross a river and meet many stranger before they reach their final destination. The journey motif continues in this novel and is more distinct.

Rusty meets a stranger, an American businessman, in the waiting room of the railway station. Ruskin Bond makes Rusty narrate the story of *The Room on the Roof* to the stranger, thus connecting the two novels. For a reader who has not read the earlier novel, it provides a continuation in the theme of journey.

The two boys board the train at night. Early in the morning they are forced to slip out of the carriage on the side facing jungle. This is very much in tune with the theme of the elders pushing them out of the safety of the home into the wild world. For the boys it is the jungle filled with wild animals, which offers solace.

On the way they pass through a field, and collect a few corncobs for breakfast. They roast them and eat them after they cover two miles in the jungle. They decide to walk the remaining 12 miles without speaking. But their thoughts are similar. Both want each other's company. They care for each other. As an adolescent Rusty is learning to take responsibility. He takes upon himself the responsibility of Kishen who is younger to him.

"Rusty was thinking, I do not know how but when we get to Dehra I have got to make a living for both of us. Kishen is too young to look after himself. He will only get into trouble. I would not like to leave him alone even for a little while. And Kishen was thinking, we will get money somehow. There are many ways of getting money. I do not mind anything as long as we are together. I do not mind anything as long as I am not alone". (pp. 672)

This feeling of companionship and love is what an adolescent wants. As a contrast there is the callousness of the adults who do not understand this basic need of a child. They are too busy in their own world to care about the child's needs. In the barren world of the selfish adults, there is this spring of love from their peer group. They find solace in each other's company.

Ruskin Bond's fiction is replete with allegory and symbols. As the boys keep thinking of their soothing love for each other they hear the sound of rushing water. Water symbolizes life, hope and energy. They are each other's hope and draw energy from their loving and caring relationship.

"They removed their shoes. Tying them together by laces and hanging them about their necks and holding hands for security they stepped into the water" They cross the river holding on to each other. As they cross the jungle they have a surprise meeting with a full-grown tiger. Both of them, too frightened to move, stand staring at the tiger. The tiger, as surprised to see the boys as the boys themselves, after a moment's hesitation crosses the path and disappears into the forest, without so much as a growl. The boys get back their voice only after they cross the jungle and reach the village.

"I think we frightened that tiger more than it frightened us" said Kishen "why, it did not even roar!"

"And good thing it didn't, otherwise we might not have been here". They laughed at themselves, and when they laughed, they were happy. (pp. 674)

Rusty felt more at ease with Kishen than he did with anyone else – probably because Kishen had been one of his first friends, and they had grown swiftly together from childhood to adolescence.

As though they had a premonition or as if the forest was a better place, when they finally reached the town which had been their home, it seemed suddenly strange and heartless as though it did not recognize them anymore.

Life is full of surprises and the second surprise for them after the encounter with the tiger, was their encounter with the lock on their room on the roof. They were as stunned as they were on encountering the tiger.

"Afterwards they walked through the noisy crowded bazaar which they knew so well, past the clock tower up the steps of their old room. They were ready to flop down on the string cot and sleep for a week. But when they reached the top of the steps they found the door locked. It was not their lock, but a heavy, unfamiliar padlock, and its presence was ominous." (pp.677)

They could find a place in an abandoned church to spend the night. Kishen's mother's friend Mrs. Bhushan decids to take him in her custody and Rusty coaxes him to join them. Rusty's responsibility of Kishen being passed over to Mrs Bhushan he continues his journey. He also makes new friends like Davinder, Sudheer the Lafanga and Somi. He accepts Hathi's invitation to visit him in the Garhwal mountains. When he meets Mr.Pettigrew to learn more about his father whom he had lost as a young boy, he comes to know about his aunt in Garhwal. He decides to go to Garhwal in search of his aunt.

Sudheer the Lufunga helps Rusty to find his aunt. He is a true friend and with all his way-wardness he emerges as a good friend of Rusty. After meeting his aunt he walks down the valley to reach Rishikesh. Finally Rusty declares his desire to put an end to vagrancy and return to Dehra.

"I do not know Sudheer, what is the use of anything for that matter? What would be the use of staying with you? I want to give some direction to my life. I want to work. I want to be free. I want to be able to write. I cannot wander about the hills and plains with you forever." (pp. 749)

After his return to Dehra, he had a meeting with his friends Ganga and Devindu. His aunt had returned some books which his father had left for him. One of them turned out to be a legacy, as it was a first edition of Alice in Wonderland. Mr. Pettigrew gave him some money as advance for the rare edition which helped him to buy a ticket to England.

The journey seemed to have come to an end and with Kishan settled with his relatives Rusty's mission was over..

"Already the dream was fading. That's life, thought Rusty. You can't run away from it and survive. You can't be a vagrant forever. You are getting nowhere, so you've got to stop somewhere. Kishen has stopped. He is thrown in with his lot with the settled income – he had to. Even the Mougli left the wolf-pack to return to his own people. And India was changing. This great formless mass was taking some sort of shape at last. He had to stop now, and find a place for himself or go forward to disaster" (pp. 753).

After a hurried farewell to his friends in the railway station, Rusty found himself face to face with the American businessman whom he had met at the Railway waiting room in the beginning of the novel. This provides a full circle to the journey or vagrancy of the youngsters. Each of them had reached somewhere. Rusty decided to go to England. Kishen met his relatives.

These two novels of adolescence explore the inner space of an adolescent's mind. They express in the most natural way the traumas and tribulations of a teenager in search of identity and freedom with a desire to establish himself. As Meena .G. Khorana puts it, "His novels although originally intended for adults, address typically adolescent concerns of identity, conflict with adult society and teenage sexuality with seriousness and candor. Both novels fill a void in the children's literature of India where adolescent novels, far from exploring the inner person are limited to mysteries and adventures or novels of progress"<sup>2</sup>

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#### 3.3. DELHI IS NOT FAR: FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS.

Delhi is Not Far, is another novel of adolescence where the role of family which is crucial in the life of an adolescent is analyzed. Especially for the children family provides the security and helps them develop into confident and fearless individuals. It gives them strength and stability. In Ruskin Bond's writings we see the child without a family and the effect of loneliness on his life. His protagonist is an innocent victim of broken marriage, a circumstance beyond his control. In the novel, Delhi is Not Far Bond handles this sensitive issue of the child whose family is snatched away mercilessly from him. This is done in a simple and subtle manner. Bond does not indulge in moralizing or commenting. He doesn't play the role of an adult talking about the teenager's issues. Here, in his writings, an adolescent goes through the trials and tribulation and the reader is left to draw his own conclusions.

The narrator has no family of his own. He meets a teenager Suraj whose family is snatched away during partition. There is also a girl who has no protection of family to turn to. These are the teenagers hungry for love and the sense of security that it provides. They come together as birds of the same feather. They understand each other and their need for support. Bond is a past master in handling such adolescent themes. In this novel we find a powerful portrayal of this lost child, his loneliness and powerlessness. These adolescents' world

is one of failure, poverty, drunken and abusive elders and broken marriages.

In his novels Bond depicts the characters in their true colours. His transparent honesty in depicting the psychology of an adolescent, lost in the world of selfish and abusive adults, sets his writings apart. He addresses the sensitive issue of emerging sexuality with understanding and sympathy. He is realistic in his approach. As the developmental psychologists Harris and Liehert put it, "With the onset of adolescence the sexual identity of childhood is suddenly complicated by powerful chemical and physical changes in the body that promote sexual and romantic interests" 1

In *Delhi is Not Far* the narrator develops relationships, emotional and physical with Suraj and Kamla. Both of them are homeless adolescents. They share each other's concerns and understand each other's need for mutual support. They are lonely and helpless till they meet each other.

It is this theme of loneliness that permeates throughout in all his writings.

"I wonder why God ever bothered to make men when he had the whole wide beautiful world to himself" I had said. "Why did he find it necessary to share it with others?"

"Perhaps he felt lonely" said Suraj. (pp.772) 2

It is the same feeling that brings Kamla the teenaged girl close

to these boys. One fine morning she appears on their doorstep with 'rakhi', which baffles them.

"She tied the silver tinsel round our wrists and I said-"Kamla we are proud to be your brothers and we would like to make you some gift. But at the moment there is no money with us".

"I want your protection, not your money" said Kamla. "I want to feel that I am not alone in the world" (pp. 782)

Bond touches upon the girl child and her problems. Adolescent girls like Kamla are always exploited. As adolescents there is not much of a difference in their vulnerability.

"At a certain age a boy is like young wheat, growing, healthy, on the verge of manhood. His eyes are alive, his mind quick, his gestures confident. You cannot mistake him. This is the most fascinating age when a boy becomes a man – it is interesting both physically and mentally. The growth of the body's hair, the toning of the muscle, the consciousness of growing, and changing and maturing – never again will there be so much change and development in so short a period of time. The body exudes virility, is full of currents and counter currents.

For a girl puberty is a frightening age when alarming changes begin to happen to her body. For a boy it is an age of self-assertion, of a growing confidence in himself and in his attitude to the world. His physical changes are a source of happiness and pride" (pp.779)

The delicate Bondsian humour is evident in his depiction of

beggars. His observations on begging as a profession are interesting. "The beggars in the whole are a thriving community and it came as no surprise to me when municipality decided to place a tax on begging".

The story of Ganpat Ram, the bent double beggar provides an element of fantasy and good natured humour.

There is an escape from the crowded Peepal nagar into the quiet farm on the way to a village, when the boys decide to stay under the crooked tree for a while. Surrounded by greenery they spend a few hours in the lap of mother nature, far from the noisy and dusty town. Bond's prose turns poetic as he describes the place –

"I heard a cricket singing in the crooked tree, the cooing of pigeons which dwelt in the walls of the old well; quiet breathing of Suraj; a rustling in the leaves of the tree, the distant hum of an airplane". (pp. 792) He turns melancholic and philosophic as he talks about life and death. Throughout the novel there is a string of sadness and helplessness. It is the attack of fits that Suraj had to undergo every now and then. It is the utter helplessness of Kamla who becomes a victim of circumstances. There is talk of death when they see a procession of mourners with a dead body. Suraj expresses his respect for the dead and the narrator expresses his faith in love

"It must be difficult to live on after the one you have loved has died".

"I don't know. It has not happened to me. If a love is strong I

cannot see its end – it cannot end in death .... I feel ..... even physically you would exist for me somehow". (pp.804)

Ruskin Bond is trying to reach immortality through love. It is Krishna the God of love who features in this novel often.

"Krishna is the best loved God of all the Gods. Young mothers laugh and weep as they read or hear the pranks of his childhood ... Young men pray to be as tall and strong ... young girls dream of a lover as daring as Krishna". (pp. 805-806)

Suraj plays the flute and the children gather round him to listen. It is love that is life giving force. The youth is full of life and has faith in love. Only love can conquer all.

The desire to be loved and the yearning for companionship caused by the lack of family and sense of security, work as a strong bond of friendship which brings the trio together.

"I think I hate families. I am jealous of them. Their sense of security, of independence, infuriates me. To every family I am an outsider because I have no family. A man without a family is a social outcaste. He has no credentials. A man's credentials are his father and his property. His mother is of no consequence either; it is her family – her father that matters.

So I am glad that I do not belong to a family and at the same time sad because in our country if you do not belong to a family, you are a piece of driftwood. And so two pieces of driftwood come together and finding themselves caught in the same current move along with it until they are trapped in a counter current and dispersed. And that is the way it is with me. I must cling to someone as long as circumstances will permit it." (pp. 781-782)

Bond touches upon the very essence of Hindu teachings of Lord Krishna in *Bhagavad-Gita*, when he compares human body to a log of wood floating in the river. In his fiction people come together, caught in the stream of life, move together for a while and live together and ultimately they part to move ahead. They separate as naturally as they come together and without regrets. There is an acceptance of life as it is. Bond reaches the highest reality, that is life. He doesn't make any fuss over it. He is deeply attached and at the same time unattached like a 'sthithapragya'.

Finally the narrator gets a job in Delhi and decides to move, leaving behind the small town. He takes Suraj with him. Kamla refuses to accompany.

The seed of sensuality seen in the *Delhi* is *Not Far* is at the root of another adolescent novel. "The Sensualist".

"There were no inhibitions in my friendship with Suraj. We spoke of bodies as we spoke of minds, and discussed the problem of one as we would discuss those of other, for they are really the same problems." (pp. 780)

The duality of body and mind forms major part of the novella.

The protagonist's observations in this novella connect it with the novel *The Sensualist.* "A few things reassure me. The desire to love and he loved. The beauty and ugliness of the human body, the intricacy of its design. These things fascinate me. Some times I make love as a sort of exploration of all that is physical. Falling in love becomes an exploration of the mind" (pp. 778)

# References:

<sup>1.</sup> Harris, Judith Rich and Robert Liehert. *The Child : Development from Birth to Adolescence.* Prentice Hall N.Y 1985.

The page numbers in this text refer to: Ruskin Bond : Collected Fiction. Penguin India New Delhi 1999.

### 3.4. A FLIGHT OF PIGEONS.

A Flight of Pigeons is a historical nevel set in the stormy period of Indian Sepoy Mutiny 1857. It is based on a diary published privately in England as "Mariam" by J.F. Fanlhome. Mariam, mother of fourteen years old Ruth Labadoor has a double inheritance with French father and Muslim mother. This helps her to get acceptance of the Indian Muslims and at the same time remain as a "Phirangan", a foreigner. Ruskin Bond, with his lineage of Indian and European identity finds himself at home with India. He is accepted and respected. He could depict this duality of Mariam with perfect case and understanding.

The events are narrated by the teenaged girl Ruth. It is about the trauma of the period in Indian history, ridden with political disturbance. The events take place in a small district town Shahjahanpur, 250 miles from Delhi. Initially in the revolt of the Sepoy Mutiny, 1857, the Indians had an upper hand. The Europeans found themselves in the hands of the natives. Their lives were under threat. Ironically enough the mixed social heritage of Labadoors at first made them victims of the holocaust and then it enabled them to escape and survive with the help of their attackers.

Mr. Labadoor is killed by the rebels in the Church but Ruth and Maria escape with the help of their Hindu friends and servants. Later they are passed on to the Muslims. Javed Khan provides them shelter and protection. Young Javed falls passionately in love with Ruth and

tries to convince Mariam to marry her daughter to him. Mariam displays great courage and cunning in delaying the marriage proposal. Ruth finds this young admirer of her as both interesting and terrifying. Javed emerges as a very balanced and disciplined youngster. He doesn't harass or trouble the ladies. He patiently waits for Mariam's approval. He admires Ruth's beauty. He is fascinated by her and his infatuation makes him romantic and interesting. He has a sense of honour that makes him behave with ladies in a respectful manner.

"A Pir, a wandering hermit, who was in the group touched our captor on the shoulder and said Javed you have taken away these unfortunates to amuse yourself. Give me your word of honour that you will not ill-treat or kill them... Javed Khan, his face still muffled brought his sword to a slant before his face I swear by my sword that I will neither kill nor ill-treat them."

Take care for your soul, Javed. You have taken an oath which no Pathan would break and still expect to survive. Let no harm come to these two or you may expect a short lease of life" (pp. 846-847)

Javed promises, 'upon his honour' to respect and treat the ladies with honour. Further the youth could not resist making his fascination for Ruth known to his aunt. Ruskin Bond is once again using his method of making fun of these things. He leaves it to us to decide which of these saved the ladies, whether it is their beauty, their dual heritage, the pir's insistence, Javed's infatuation, or is it just the effective handling of the whole situation by Mariam.

"How can I make you understand the fascination this girl exerted over me when she was in her father's house? The very first time I saw her, I was struck by her beauty. She shone like Zohra, the morning star. Looking at her now, I realize the truth of the saying that a flower never looks so beautiful as when it is on its parent stem. Break it and it withers in the hand .."(pp 849)

His admiration for Ruth's mother is no less. He is fascinated by her courage. He admits that he was 'awed', 'subdued' and 'unmanned' as she hurled herself at him 'like an enraged tigress and 'presented her breast to his sword." (pp 850)

As Javed describes his first impression of his love at first sight, he calls Ruth as 'a rose touched by the breath of wind, a dove-like creature.' (pp 850). The title 'Flight of Pigeons' takes its origin from this impression of the girl, beautiful and helpless like a dove, with her mother on the run. The theme is elaborated in the chapter titled 'White Pigeons'. The prediction of the *fakir* Mian Saheb to Abdul Rauf Khan, as the *fakir* discarding his white gown, put on a black one 'suddenly' and 'without any apparent reason'. Bond plays on the symbolism of color white. Here it stands also for the white man, or the *firangan*.

"He told them that the restoration of *Firangi* rule was as certain as the coming of doomsday. It would be another hundred years, he said, before the foreigners could be made to leave 'See. Here they come,' he cried pointing to the North where a flock of white pigeons could be seen hovering over the sky. They come flying like white pigeons which, when disturbed, fly away and circle, and come down to

rest again. White pigeons from the hills!" (pp. 870)

With the return of the British in Shahajahanpur the ladies decide to go there. In "The Final Journey" they face many difficulties. The presence of mind and the courage of Mariam helps them escape unscathed. With everyone settled finally, the narrator has this to say about Javed Khan.

"Javed Khan disappeared and never seen again – I have always hoped that he succeeded in escaping. I cannot help feeling a sneaking admiration for him. He was very wild and muddle headed and often cruel, but he was also very handsome and gallant, and there was in him a streak of nobility which he did his best to conceal. But perhaps I really admire him because he thought I was beautiful." (pp 896)

The novel has all the ingredients of a romance. Its setting in the 19th century, the mutiny, the description of the people running for their life. It has an element of suspense and thrill. The theme of romance and infatuation runs throughout the story. It has an appeal of its own. It stands out as a different type of novel. It is not in the same vein as Bond's other writings. It has a well designed plot and characterization. There is very little of the true Ruskin Bond in this novel. But for the under current of humour and an air of irony it would have been a novel written by any other author except Ruskin Bond.

### References:

Ruskin Bond : Collected Fiction Penguin Books India New Delhi, 1999
 (The page number in the text refer to this book).

### 3.5 THE SENSUALIST: A CAUTIONARY TALE.

The teenager, who is an alter ego of the author, narrates the story of an adolescent's growth into manhood. Here the child is not growing into a man the natural way but is forced into the adult world by the selfish adults. That is why there is an air of helplessness and the tragedy. This aspect is remarkably absent in most of his writings for adolescents.

As the protagonist narrates his encounter with the adult world and his adventures of exploring the basic human instincts we can trace the development of the individual's ego consciousness – his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses – This in turn enables him to face the arduous tasks with which life confronts him.

Once again the novella confirms the theory of Psychologist like Jung, who argue that an adolescent's search for identity can be viewed as a replication of the myth motive of the hero who goes on a journey "to discover and assert his personality". In the novella the narrator undertakes a journey in which he meets his alter ego in the form of a mystic in a cave. As this cave man unfolds the story of his adventure- crossing forbidden realms, facing many challenges and listening to the 'Devil' in his heart- he also "evaluates and questions long held values and beliefs" in order to "acquire the freedom and responsibility of adulthood" Reed.

The recluse in the story has reached "the stage of diffusion which is distinguished by avoidance, lack of commitment, and withdrawal from life. Harris and Liehert

First published in the book form in "Strangers in the Night; Two Novellas" in 1996 by Penguin Books India, the Sensualist was originally written and published in the form of a serial in the Bombay magazine Debonair twenty-nine years ago. During Emergency period the author was dragged to the court on charges of obscenity. He became defensive and did not publish it for the next 20years. It appeared in the Penguin India's Omnibus Volume in the year 1996. In this volume he adds a subtitle "The Sensualist: A Cautionary Tale". In the introduction he warns that the book is not intended for school classroom. He defends himself by saying that "Just now and then I let my hair down and indulge in a little gentle ribaldry or a tale of desire under the deodars" <sup>2</sup>

About the controversial novel The Sensualist he says,

"The Sensualist is the story of a man enslaved by an overpowering sex-drive but it takes him on to the downward spiraling road to self-destruction; you could even say it has a moral".3

At the same time he says that, *The Sensualist* is not autobiographical. He says that there is a Jekyll and Hyde in each of us. These two personalities warring with each other all the time and "to that extent it reveals something of the author's psyche".<sup>4</sup>

The protagonist is an adolescent, who is the only child for his parents. The teenager has all the material comforts. He has a family with loving and caring mother. Father being a busy businessman is too engrossed in making money to take care of his son's emotional needs. The young boy gets seduced by the maidservant and with no one to check him he falls into the whirlpool of body and mind. The desire for gratification of senses aroused in the little boy by the adult female leads him down the spiraling road to destruction. His mother is worried about the boy's strange behavior but unable to understand. The father tries to involve him in work and sends him to Delhi to take part in the Industrial Exhibtion. But the boy is not interested. He gets down from train midway and goes wandering.. He helps the young boy Roop to reach his home in the hills and accompanies him. Here he meets Roop's mother, another adult who exploits him.

"I was to be enslaved by this woman in a way that no woman had ever been enslaved by me. As time passed, I became aware of her strange and powerful matriarchal passion. It was not the passive worship of Mulia, but something quite different." [pp. 134]

It has a moral so long as the good part of the narrator's personality succeeds in overcoming the influence of the recluse in the cave. It is also a cautionary tale as the recluse says that he had misused the gift and had lost it. The cave is psychological symbol of withdrawal. The man withdraws and hides himself from the world. It is dark and clammy inside the cave, "a home for those who despise

the light - bats rodents and hollow men ..... I want to flee from the cave, from all within it. Renunciation? He has not renounced the world, he has hidden from it. And I wonder how many thousands there are like him - men who have run not simply from the world but from themselves. Men, who hating themselves, cannot bear to see their own reflections in the faces of the other men". (pp. 142)

The author uses the technique of narrative within narrative. Hence both the narrators form part of the author's voice. Ruskin Bond leaves nothing to the reader's imagination. He acknowledges influence of Conrad and his theme of evil. There is some element of sadness in this story which is alien to Bond's nature. Bond has a comic vision and he most often laughs at the weaknesses of men and women. His sense of humanity pervades all his writings and makes them delightful to read.

The recluse in the story is Bond's another self. He is his "secret sharer". In the end Bond conquers this pessimism and gains victory over his darker self. As he leaves the cave, he also leaves the cave man behind... "I leave my dead self in the cave and continue my search for the perfect stranger in the night". (pp.143)

# Reference:

Reed, Artha J.S. Reaching Adolescence: The young adult book and the school. Holt Rinehart and Winston N.Y 1985.

Ruskin Bond. Introduction Strangers in The Night. Penguin books India. New Delhi, 1996.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid

<sup>5.</sup> Ruskin Bond Strangers in The Night. Penguin books India. New Delhi, 1966. (The page numbers in this text refer to this book).

## 3.6 <u>A HANDFUL OF NUTS.</u>

A Handful of Nuts is full of his reminiscences. Here he relives his adolescent days. As he puts it – "A Handful of Nuts is about myself at twenty-one, an age that is important to each one of us. It is an age when we have to come to terms with our own natures if we are to survive the rigors of life's long journey to the end of the night" 1

Published in the volume Strangers in the Night, Two Novellas, along with "The Sensualist: A Cautionary Tale", this novella is a delightful narrative dealing with the adolescent's vision of the world. At the age of 21, on the threshold of adulthood an adolescent feels jubilant and full of life. Every girl and boy aspire to become heroine or a hero. They are romantic and full of dreams. At times these things lead to comic errors. In the introduction Ruskin Bond admits -"It is a self-portrait of the author as a sensitive and occasionally mischievous youth. Or rather of a mischievous elderly author looking back on this innocent youth".<sup>2</sup>

Even though he has tried to capture his youthful days and some of the characters are his real life friends, he asks us not to take it as straight autobiography. As a good story-teller, he has a selective memory, partly from the real life and partly from a sheer imaginary world.

The Room on the Roof, written by an adolescent and A Handful Nuts, written by the elderly author about his adolescent days make an interesting study in contrast. The Room on the Roof is a serious

account of an adolescent's adventures. At that age everything assumes seriousness. The author himself an adolescent depicts the events with sincerity and that gives it an appeal. The events depicted in A Handful of Nuts are more of a light hearted escapades than serious adventures. We can see the distinctly different approach to the same period in the life of the author. When he narrates his romance with Mrs. Kapoor, it assumes a seriousness of purpose. It is an important happening in his life. The impact is so deep that it has its effects on the action of the protagonist in his later stage. It is his love for Mrs. Kapoor and her memory that prompts him to take the responsibility of Kishan. He even changes his plans of going to England. He decides to leave for England only after Kishen is settled comfortably. In the novella 'A Handful of Nuts' the actions of the youth are seen through the eyes of an elderly author 'mischievous' as he claims, as innocent pranks. His attraction for Indu is a light hearted crush and has little effect on his life. In the beginning of the fourth chapter the author explains.

"Why have I chosen to write about the twenty first year of my life?

Well, for one thing, its often the most significant year in any young person's life. A time for falling in love, a time to set about making your dreams come true, a time to venture forth, to blaze new trails, take risks do your own thing, follow your star..."3

It is an age for fantasy and romantic infatuation. It turns out to be a delightful comedy as Bond makes fun of the youth – the wedding band unwittingly breaking into funeral march, the narrator's birthday celebration, the circus, fascination for the circus girls, the tiger's escape from the tent. In the epilogue he gives an account of the nuts after forty years. A Handful of Nuts is more of a memoir which is light hearted and full of humour than a serious novella.

This will lead to the question whether a writer writing for adolescents can do justice only when he is himself an adolescent?

If the author can go back to his adolescent days and relive the experience he can come close to the reader's heart. While writing for children, author has to go back in time and actually re-live his childhood. The success of the book for adolescents depends on to what extent the author succeeds in this endeavor. Adolescents do not like moralizing or preaching. They simply don't want to be told about anything. It is an age of rebellion, challenging the authority. They like to share their feelings with their friends, the peer group. Hence the author has to be their friend, talking in their own language. Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof* and *Vagrants in the Valley* are the best examples of writing for an adolescent in India.

### References:

Ruskin Bond. Introduction Strangers in The Night. Penguin books India. New Delhi, 1966.

<sup>2.</sup> ibid

<sup>3.</sup> ibid pp.14.