

## Visual Writing and Art of Narration in Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof*

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### Abstract :

*'If there's one name that is synonymous with children's literature in India, It's Ruskin Bond'. The Room on the Roof is a classic novel penned by Ruskin Bond, an eminent and versatile Indian English author. This paper gives a glimpse of Bond's work providing an insight into his visual writing where he portrays the beauty of Dehradun, the Himalayan foothills through the eyes of the protagonist, Rusty. Rusty struggles with concerns of identity, belonging, and cultural differences as he progresses through adolescence. Bond has presented a detailed account of the experiences and challenges that he faced during his journey to establish his own personality as an individual while he was a teenager. In this sense, the novel is an autobiographical account of the author's life. This paper also focuses on Protagonist transformation and growth from the perspective of bildungsroman novel. The paper is going to discuss Bond's amusing writing style and his simplistic approach while describing a place, a season or a person in the novel.*

**Keywords :** Adolescence , semiautobiographical, bildungsroman novel, Imagery, harmony with nature,

### Introduction :

Born on May 19, 1934, in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, Ruskin Bond is the most popular Indian English novelist and short-story writer among school children and adolescents. His first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, was published in 1956, and it received the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957. Bond has authored more than 500 short stories, essays, and novels which includes 69 books for children. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014. He lives with his adopted family in Landour, Mussoorie, in the Indian state of Uttarakhand.

When he was eight, his parents separated and his mother left him. Following the sudden demise of his father, he moved to Dehradun where his grandmother raised him. Despite his suffering and lonely childhood, Bond developed an optimistic outlook on life. He chose the path of becoming an earnest writer that his father wished him to follow. Therefore, he found solace in reading books that habit was also inculcated in him by his father. Some of his favorite reads include T. E. Lawrence, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte and Rudyard Kipling.

At the age of 17 in London, Ruskin Bond wrote his first novel; *The Room on the Roof* in 1953. The novel charts the life of an orphaned Anglo-Indian teenager. He runs away to live with his friends as he escapes the tyranny of his strict guardian. It was not published until he was twenty-one. He was awarded John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial prize for his first novel. The award and appreciation he got for his first work motivated him to write its sequel, *Vagrants in the Valley*. The novel focuses on the crisis of one's own identity in the post-Independent era. In this novel, Bond depicted many things like love, relationship, friendship, responsibilities, adolescent stage, and the confusion of age.

### **A Brief Insight of Protagonist's Journey :**

This novel depicts the story of Rusty, a sixteen-year-old Anglo-Indian boy who rebels against his guardian's strict rules and seeks solace in the company of local Indian boys. *Unhappy with the strict ways of his guardian, Rusty runs away from home to live with his Indian friends. Plunging for the first time into the dream-bright world of the bazaar, Hindu festivals and other aspects of Indian life, Rusty is enchanted. In the introduction of the novel, Rusty is appeared as a pale boy, with blue-grey eyes and fair hair. His face is rough and marked and lower lip hangs loose and heavy.* The character projects complexity in a relationship, confusion about life, love, and happiness. Bond's character creates an image of adolescence in readers' minds. Bond's Keen observation is also reflected through his protagonist 'Rusty'. The story revolves around the protagonist, an orphan boy Rusty and his struggle for life. In this journey, Rusty encounters with some Indian friends – Somi, Ranbir and Suri.

### **Theme of the Novel :**

**Teenage Rebellion :** The theme of the story is based on teenage rebellion. Rusty lives in an European colony located in the outskirts of Dehradun with his guardian, Mr. Harrison. The guardian forces a regimented environment over him and often beats him with a cane upon finding him at a mistake. By no way, the guardian was like his father.

**Post Independence :** The story is of 1950s when India was recently gained independence from the Britishers and the matter of racism was very much evident in Mr. Harrison's behaviour since he often told Rusty that going to bazaar means India, Indians epitomize dirt and commotion.

**Semi Autobiographical element :** *The Room on the Roof* is a semi-autobiographical work of Ruskin Bond. It was written when the author was himself seventeen. As the novel progresses , readers can get to know more about Rusty and become familiar with the author. The book has a strong autobiographical element as it's based on Bond's actual experiences living in a small rented room on the roof in Dehradun. He started his venture into writing at his teenage, and he embarked on the journey by writing a semi-autobiography and introduced us with a little boy called Rusty. A boy with no family was forced to embrace his loneliness. All that he wrote is largely a part of his own experience. Some of the characters have the same name they had in actual life. In this sense, the novel is an autobiographical account of the Bond's life. The autobiographical nature of his fiction makes him an Indian Charles Lamb.

**Point of view as a Bildungsroman Novel :** Bildungsroman is a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood in which character change is important. *The Room on the Roof* portrays Rusty's transformation from a quiet, submissive, and dependant youngster to a brave, assertive, and independent adult with worldly understanding. The exposure to the outside world developed in him a sense of self awareness. Rusty, after leaving his home, took shelter in Somi's house. Now his life was going to take a new turn, a turn which will put many new challenges before him. The new room not only gave Rusty shelter but also a feeling of selfhood. It was a room where he could explore his true essence, where he could give wings to his dreams and desires, a room of his own from where his journey to become a writer will begin. The room is a symbol of his liberation from the prison of restrictions in which he was imprisoned.

*The Room on the Roof* is Rusty's journey of his transformation from childhood to adulthood, a journey full of hardships, difficulties, trials and tribulations and many hard experiences which ultimately developed him into an adult. His pursuit for selfhood is finally achieved after undergoing colossal sufferings.

**About adolescence by an adolescent :** *The Room on the Roof* is a novel by an adolescent about the adolescent. Adolescence is the period of transition, the period of growth from childhood to youth. Bond has chosen the young boys as main characters in the novel. Yes, it was written out of loneliness of a young person longing for love and family. It has the passion and intensity we possess only when we are in our teens, and that, I think, is what has kept it alive all these years. It reflects the writer as he was when he wrote it- naive, trustful, eager for love and friendship. Hence it is clear that a novel is about adolescence by an adolescent.

**Visual artistic style of writing and love for Nature:** Visual writing is a technique of creating vivid images in the reader's mind using descriptive language, sensory details, and figurative expression. Bond considers himself a "visual writer" since he first imagines the story like a film and then notes it down. He says that his forte is observation, recollection and reflection. Bond shares a unique relationship with nature which is beautifully depicted in his scenes. The writing is simple yet artistic. He takes us on a visual tour along with the story, the simple charms of a small Indian town are portrayed beautifully. The hills, the lush green jungles, the scent of flowers, the lively bazaar, the street vendors, the friendly locals; *Ruskin Bond's* description of Dehra will immediately transport you to that place. This story is woven with lots of characters and their emotions and the author did justice in portraying them aptly. These characters are ordinary people like us yet so appealing, no exaggeration or extravagance. There were a few funny descriptions also which will act as a tea break in this otherwise serious story. Imagery plays a fundamental role in Bond's writing and secures an excellent place for him in the group of visual artists. Some examples of imageries in the novel are :

Somi's long and athletic legs dressed with short pants and turban, gliding round the low hills, jungle on either side of the road, tea garden, bazaar, Clock Tower which is a tower without a clock, cries of the vendors, smell of cattle and ripening dung, Holi celebration with his friends Ranbir, Somi and Suri etc. Depiction of the slushy and muddy roads in the rainy season; people relishing jallebies, golappas, tikkies, stray dogs and cows etc. cause a mental reproduction of sensation.

### **Third person Narration : Omniscient Point of View**

In the third-person omniscient the narrator knows every characters' thoughts, feelings and actions. Omniscient means 'all knowing'. Third-person omniscient gives writers the opportunity to explore relationships between multiple characters. The omniscient narrator, Bond starts a scene by describing the weather and landscape, then shifts to a character in a windowless room, describing them and telling the reader what they're thinking about.

The way Bond depicted the appearance of the sweeper boy in chapters II and IV can move readers. He portrayed not only the feelings of Rusty but also the feelings of the sweeper Boy without saying a word. The untouchable smiles as he passes by the window. When Mr. Harrison uses his can to beat Rusty. Rusty lays down and moans. Then sweeper boy sympathies with him.

In the story, Mr. Kapoor is an alcoholic who is twenty years older than his lovely wife Meena Kapoor. Rusty gets captivated by her beauty and falls in love with her. Even she responds to his feelings and falls in love with Rusty because her husband holds no special bonding for her and is always in a drunken state. Unfortunately, their love story could not proceed ahead. One day, Mr. and Mrs. Kapoor leave for Delhi. After a few days, Rusty and Kishen get a telegram informing them of Meena's death in a car accident in Delhi. Kishen breaks down drastically while Rusty feeling alone once again plunges into depression and self-pity.

### **Conclusion :**

Bond said in an interview, "I wanted to be recognized as a writer all my life." He continues to mesmerize readers of all age groups with his witty, humorous and simple tales. *The novel The Room*

*on the Roof*, amuses, moves and saddens also at the same time with his simple yet powerful writing. This kind of narrative technique, lucid language and keen insight of the narrator make this novel the best read. Therefore, it's not hyperbole to state that it is indeed a very heart warming composition.

Undoubtably, Ruskin Bond is a 'True Wizard of the Indian English Literature' and a living legend who had filled fun in many of the young kids' as well as all age groups' lives with his incredible writings and secures an outstanding place in the entire range of Indian English writing.

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