

Evolving into Adolescents: A Critical Study on Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof*

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Abstract:

Ruskin Bond, an eminent and versatile Indian English author of British lineage, is the author of the timeless coming-of-age story *The Room on the Roof*. The novel is set in Dehradun, India, a picturesque town nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, and provides a vivid description of the natural beauty of the region. The story also highlights the cultural differences and social norms prevalent in India during the 1950s. This novel depicts the story of Rusty, a sixteen-year-old Anglo-Indian boy who rebels against his guardian's strict rules and finds solace in the company of local Indian boys. As Rusty navigates his way through adolescence, he grapples with issues of identity, belonging, and cultural differences. Bond has provided a detailed account of the experiences and obstacles that he faced during his journey to establish his own personality as an individual while he was a teenager. In this sense, the book is an autobiographical account of the author's life. Rusty, the main character, has a disposition that mirrors that of Bond, the main character. The author's own feelings and emotions are reflected in the main character's actions and interactions. Through the portrayal of the character Rusty, the readers can see every facet of his existence as a young adult. The protagonist decides to flee his house in order to find out who he really is because he is unable to put up with the frequent mistreatment he receives from his guardian. The focus of my research paper is on the protagonist development from a timid, submissive, and dependent child into an assertive, brave, and independent adolescent who possesses knowledge of the world.

Key Words: *Adolescence, Submissive, Dependency, Timid, Culture*

Ruskin Bond is known for his simplicity, yet he captures the essence of life in the hills of India with great depth and sensitivity. His stories have been translated into several languages and have won numerous awards. His legacy lives on as his books continue to inspire generations of young readers, and his impact on Indian literature cannot be overstated. He remains a beloved figure in the literary world, and his contributions will be remembered for years to come. His unique perspective allows him to capture the beauty in everyday moments and turn them into something magical, inspiring readers to appreciate the world around them in a new way. His writing is a reminder that there is wonder to be found in even the most mundane aspects of life. His work has been of significant importance to the development of children's literature in

India. In 1992, the Indian Council for Child Education and India's National Academy of Literature presented him with the Sahitya Academy Prize in recognition of his groundbreaking contributions to the development of children's literature. He stretched the boundaries of imagination in order to discover something extraordinary in the ordinary.

His works often depict the struggles of young protagonists who are trying to find their place in the world and understand their own identity while also dealing with the complexities of adult relationships and societal expectations. These themes are explored through vivid descriptions of landscapes and settings, as well as through the characters' internal struggles and emotional journeys.

This shows that the author has a keen eye for detail and is able to draw inspiration from the world around him, making his stories relatable and engaging for readers. His ability to capture everyday experiences and turn them into compelling narratives is a testament to his skill as a writer. His vivid descriptions of the landscape and the people of the Garhwal Himalaya create a sense of place that is as much a character in his stories as the human protagonists. His writing captures the essence of life in this region, with its rugged terrain, harsh winters, and deep-rooted traditions.

Thomas Hardy's Wessex and Ruskin Bond's places in his works are known for their portrayal of rural life and the simplicity of their characters, making them relatable to readers across generations. The author's ability to capture the essence of small-town life in India has earned him a dedicated following and cemented his place as one of the country's most beloved authors.

His works explore a wide range of human experiences, including travel, adventure, exploration, alienation, loneliness, homelessness, running away from home, human connection, infatuation, physical attraction, love, friendship, family and parental disappointment, separation, and the joys and sorrows of growing up.

Characters and events in the novel spring spontaneously from the author's observations and participation in the world around him. His stories shine even brighter because they so closely mirror his views of everyday life, including boys and girls, men and women, bazaars and shops, hills and plains, trees and forests. The majority of his stories take place in Dehra, Mussoorie, and other areas of the Garhwal Himalaya, which is known for its majesty and natural splendour. "Bond is not only a wonderful storyteller but also a great human being who has nurtured simplicity in life through the decades," says Upendra Arora of Natraj Publishers in Dehradun (*Hindustan Times* 2019).

The Room on the Roof, A Flight of Pigeons, The Blue Umbrella, A Village Named Dehra, The Adventures of Rusty, Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra, Angry

River, Roads to Mussoorie, and All Roads Lead to Ganga are just few of the many works of the author. In his novels and short stories, he mirrored his early sentiments of insecurity and isolation through most of his adolescent characters. That is especially true of his protagonist, Jack London. Personal sufferings such as the divorce of his parents and the untimely passing of his father instilled in him, at an impressionable age, a profound sense of belonging to the natural world and to people he had never met. He accepted everything that this vicious society had disregarded or taken advantage of, and he did so enthusiastically. It would appear that the writer is most interested in writing about adolescence. The majority of his extraordinary fictional heroes are adolescent men between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who are full of desire, curiosity, dreams, energy, feeling, and thrill in addition to, of course, love that is pure and unrestricted. They are accessible to anyone, just like the author himself. They have gained the wisdom that life can take on a variety of forms because they have spent their lives surrounded by unspoiled natural environments. Always present, nature can either remain in the background or become an active participant in the unfolding of events. Nature is never absent. His protagonists serve as vehicles for him to communicate his views.

The Room on the Roof, which was the author's first attempt at writing a novel, is a masterpiece that was written while he was only seventeen years old and is about the life of adolescents in India. In 1957, it was recognised as the best work of fiction by being awarded the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Award. It is somewhat inspired by his time spent in Dehradun, specifically with his close friends and in the cramped room he rented up on the roof. The novel does an excellent job of describing the hopes and passions that capture the minds and emotions of young people. It tells the age-old tale of a young person's transition into adulthood, which has captivated many readers throughout the ages. It has a well-crafted plot, and the characters are pulled from real life situations. In other words, it has all the ingredients of an excellent novel. This novel is genuine and honest to the very centre of

its being. In a letter to the author dated March 23, 1964, his mentor and experienced editor Diana Athill noted as follows:

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 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. (4)

The author, at just seventeen years old, changed his life and moved to England in the hope of finding work there. Because he was born and raised in India, he had a profound sentiment of homesickness for the nation of his birth. He came to the conclusion that India, the country he held the deepest affection for, is his home. This novel is written as an outlet for his feelings of estrangement and longing for home. His adolescent friends, with whom he had shared the simple joys and sorrows of life in India, have been reimagined as the characters in this story.

The novel is based on his experiences as a young man growing up in India. There are some parallels to be drawn between this novel and the author's own life. The subject matter is very personal to him, and it accurately reflects his observations and reflections on life. Taking place in Dehra Dun in the years after India gained its independence, the story re-creates the romance of the time by presenting it through the impressionistic eyes of a little child named Rusty. The style of the novel is reminiscent of an impressionist painting. This event is meant to be a celebration of life. Both the author and the character of Rusty, who is a teenager, are the same age. There is a time when one can have both hope and dreams.

Life in all its forms is the central theme of the novel *The Room on the Roof*. Rusty, who is Anglo-Indian and sixteen years old, is being raised by Mr. John Harrison, who is also an Anglo-Indian and also his guardian. Rusty inherited the twin culture from his parents. He was orphaned at a very young age, and he is the only young boy in his neighbourhood. He feels imprisoned by the rules of his home and neighbourhood.

He has a strong desire to be in the company of others. In his whole life, he has only interacted with two boys: a sweeper and an untouchable. As a rebellious adolescent, he goes out, and when his guardian, Mr. Harrison, tries to stop him by punishing him, he flees the protection of his home to discover the wider world outside his front door. Much like any other teenager in his age, he decides to leave home for the sole purpose of escaping the control exercised by the adults in his life. Dehra is a town in northern India, and he is eager to see more of the vibrant culture there.

The Anglo-Indians never gave the protagonist permission to enter the marketplace, so he sneaks there frequently to satisfy his craving. Nevertheless, an accidental meeting with several of the local boys, including Somi, Kishen, Ranbir, and Suri, opens a fresh door for him to the wider world. The chai shop in the market is the perfect place to enjoy this newly discovered sense of liberty since it has the right kind of atmosphere. His friends are the ones who initially expose him to the sour golgappas, and he develops an immediate liking to them.

The joy of his new companionship inspires him to do things he would not normally do, like speaking out against the man who is supposed to be his guardian. Somi aids him in securing employment so he may support himself financially. He begins to have feelings for Meena, who is his friend Kishen's mother. After his friends left town, he became lonely and decided to follow them in order to have more exciting experiences.

The author recounts the vibrant colours, energetic music, and playful water fights that make up the Holi festivities. The experience of being fully immersed in this cultural celebration is both exhilarating and overwhelming for the author. The novel highlights the clash between traditional and modern values, as well as the generation gap between the guardian and the young boy. It also emphasises the importance of embracing new experiences and learning from different cultures. He loves to explore the nature around him and often goes on adventures with his friends, discovering new things and having

fun. However, he also faces challenges such as poverty and a lack of access to basic necessities like clean water.

They share stories and jokes, and sometimes they even plan their mischievous adventures. Despite the simplicity of the setting, these moments spent together become cherished memories that they will always hold dear. The author's vivid portrayal of the bustling marketplace, with its vibrant colours and sounds, immerses the reader in the lively atmosphere of Dehra. The bazaar serves as a backdrop for the protagonist's experiences and highlights the importance of community in his life.

The excitement of the unpretentious Holi holiday celebrations and the cultural shock are beautifully conveyed. It also illustrates the contrast between the young boy with a fresh perspective who finds it to be a task that is nice and pleasurable and his guardian's sophisticated Anglo-Indian sensibilities getting a nasty jolt. The young man is completely confused. For the boy, the outside world is like a magical place. He bathes in the public faucet with his friends. The links of friendship with his street-smart pals Somi and Ranbir are strengthened by the joy, enthusiasm, warmth, and freedom. It's interesting to read the description of the Dehra bazaar.

Rusty comes into contact with everything that is unfamiliar to him. Dehra is the one who imparts the wisdom of life to him on a daily basis. His buddies Somi and Ranbir show him fresh and exciting ways to spend his life. They bring a new zeal for life to the table. It doesn't take long for Rusty to develop feelings for Somi because of the friendly atmosphere and the lovely hospitality she always shows. Somi helps out a friend in need by finding work as a private instructor for Kishen, who belongs to the Kapoor family. During the time that he is staying at their home, Rusty develops a love for Mrs. Kapoor. At the picnic, being in close proximity to the lady brings him an incredible amount of joy, which befits his age. He declares his love for her, and she responds positively to his declaration. A young woman named Mrs. Kapoor, who is married to an

alcoholic man, takes pleasure in the admiration of a young man her age. Her appetite for love and recognition is sated as a result of it.

The author, who was also a teenager at the time, writes in the most authentic way possible on how adolescents feel. Rusty, however, is not allowed to live in a fantasy world for very long before he is compelled to confront reality and learn the truth about it. Mrs. Kapoor dies in an automobile accident. The young teenager is at a loss for words after being confronted with the harsh realities of life.

Rusty was over by a feeling of impotence and futility and of unimportance of life. Every moment, he told himself, someone 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. (632)

When his close friends Ranbir and Suri leave, and when Somi is about to leave for Amritsar, the sensitive adolescent's mind is put through another round of excruciatingly painful separation. Once more, Rusty finds himself to be on his own. In the end, he makes the decision to depart from Dehra and India altogether, most likely in an effort to get as far away as possible from the traumatic memory of Meena's passing. Kishen is going to travel to Hardwar.

As Rusty makes his way to Hardwar to say goodbye to Kishen before embarking on his journey to England, he is confronted with a new and different set of the realities of his life. He discovers that Meena's husband has remarried and is now leading a happy married life with his new wife, while his friend has become a vagrant. Kishen is unable to come to terms with the fact that his father has remarried, so he chooses to cut all ties with him and flees the family home. He reinvents himself as a notorious career criminal. The concept of self-destruction, in which an individual intentionally causes harm to

themselves, is the phenomenon that is seen most frequently in adolescents.

The mind of a young person is neither that of a child, which readily forgets things, nor that of an adult, which is able to forgive. Adolescence is a stage that exists precisely between childhood and adulthood. In this setting, the child is able to comprehend and experience. However, he lacks the maturity to comprehend and accept responsibility for his actions. This is the motivation behind the uprising that takes place. This is an expression of the adolescent's disbelief and disenchantment with the adult world, which is shocking to them. An adolescent reaches this point in their development when, in the absence of the appropriate guidance of an adult, they become totally confused and react violently.

The title can also be interpreted as a metaphor for life. While sitting in his room on the roof, Rusty spends most of his time ruminating on his own mortality. The reality of death comes before the reality of life. Yet in chamber up above of Rusty, he has an experience with the harsher aspects of life, such as death, misery, and most importantly, his own isolation. His traveling companions are not native to the world of humans but rather from the natural world. To sum up, one can say that Ruskin Bond is a prolific and successful writer who has produced rich literature for the young reader in India, appealing to their imagination, mind, and heart, and inspiring many young writers to pursue careers writing for adolescent children.

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