



Adolescent Concerns In The Novel The Room On The Roof By Ruskin Bond

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond is one of the foremost novelists who have dealt with the adolescent life in Indian English literature. Born in an Anglo Indian family and deprived of his parents at an early age (his mother divorced her father when Bond was about eight years old and father died when he was still at school) he faced the stern realities of life. Like Dickens he experienced the problems of a teenager who is left alone without parental support in this dark and wide world. He was lucky to get financial help to go to England to be a writer. The Room on the Roof is the story of an Anglo- Indian adolescent, Rusty, who has lost his parents and is left alone in a world where he has no relative to support him. His first encounter is with his guardian Mr. Harrison, who almost a tyrant and who chokes his natural growth. An adolescent is different from a child. A child is entirely dependents on its parents or guardian. It can protest but is unable to revolt. Harrison is unaware of this fact. Rusty, now an adolescent, is a changed boy. He wants independence and freedom to mix with the people of his choice. When he is physically assaulted, he revolts; he retaliates and beats Harrison severely. His encounter makes him realise that he has grown up and is now a young man. The two facts of adolescents one realise here. They are the adolescent's entrance to the world of the grown up people and the ability of self-assertion.

It is the self –assertion and the sense of having grown up that emboldens Rusty to leave his guardian's house and go to his friend's house to seek his future. Thirdly, the sense of having grownup manifests in his love for Meena Kapoor and the role of being a guardian of Kishen. Bond has stated these facts, not in terms of psychology or sociology but through the structure of the novel. The room is the symbol of the adolescent world.

Key words: Anglo-Indian, teenager, Adolescent, Self-assertion, Psychology

Ruskin Bond (b.1934) is the most popular Indian English novelist and short-story writer among school children and adolescents. His stories, novels and reminiscences are prescribed in school syllabuses all over India. Bond deserves better treatment for his handling of the sensitive issue of "growing up". Young people are the future of a nation. In order to give guidance and direction to youth, their aspirations and frustrations must be understood. It is important to note that a child has tremendous power to grow and fight against the adverse circumstances. Most of the great people have overcome penury and emerged victorious against odd circumstances. Bond's adolescents fight bravely with full optimism and come out with flying colours. He describes their circumstances and helplessness realistically and waves us to the world of the downtrodden and of poverty without being pessimistic. He himself passed through the ordeal of an orphan's life and it is by dint of hard labour and Zest of life became a successful writer.

Ruskin Bond's major novels are about adolescents and children. His first novel *The Room on the Roof* is a novel by an adolescent about adolescents. The term "adolescent" has a specific meaning in psychology. It should not be confused with the word "teenager", although the periods of adolescence and teenage are almost the same. Teenage is the period between thirteen and nineteen. When a boy or girl enters the age of thirteen he or she is called a teenager and continues to be called so till the age of nineteen. The period of adolescence covers the years of from thirteen to twenty and according to some psychologists up to twenty-one. If we look at the characters of Ruskin Bond, all the important characters such as Rusty, Somi, Ranbir, Sudheer, Kishore, Ruth and Suri are in their early adolescence. The term adolescence is derived from the Latin word *adolescere* which means "to grow up". According to Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow, The period of transition from childhood to adulthood or from dependence on adult direction and protection to self-direction and self determination is referred to as adolescence, adolescent age or adolescent period of development¹

Friedenberg describes adolescence thus:

Adolescence is the period during which a young person learns who he is, and what he really feels. It is a time in which he differentiates himself from the culture; though on the culture terms. It is the age at which, by becoming a person in his own right, he becomes capable of deeply felt relationships to other individuals, perceived clearly as such.² Adolescence is first of all a period of physical and physiological change. This growth furnishes the basis for emotional, social, intellectual and economic maturity.

The important works where adolescents have leading roles were written in the Victorian era.

Dickens's *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* are all great novels but the leading –David, Oliver and Pip—are all adolescents. The total career of these characters is a good material for modern psychologists. There is similarity between *David Copperfield*'s life and Bond's. The only difference is that for the former his mother was the support and for the latter his father. Both lost their support early in life. Secondly, *David Copperfield*'s support was too feeble but Bond's strong enough to make him tread the thorny path of life with full confidence. Ruskin Bond's childhood was unhappy, the reason being the continual quarrel between his father and mother. He always felt insecure. Like Dickens, he was a sensitive child. Dickens never pardoned his mother for her insistence that he should continue to work in the blacking factory. Bond too did not forgive his mother for divorcing his father and her frivolity. Bond found affinity with Dickens and the *David Copperfield* became his most favourite novel.

He writes:

I was still a pimply adolescent when I wished to be a writer of eminence. I had read Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Hugh Walpole's *Fortitude* and decided that I wanted to be like the writer-heroes of both books.³ The problems of humanity are faithfully portrayed and analysed by great writers and they also give solutions which are supported by their wisdom. The wisdom Bond culled from these books gave him the light to go successfully through dark labyrinth of life. He became an orphan at the age of ten but his determination made him cross all the hurdles of life. "The first twenty-one years of my life form the period covered by this memoir. Although, for most of us, these are not years of great achievement, they are the formative years, and the most emotional, impressionable, vulnerable years. There are struggles, setbacks, failures, but hope and optimism have not been blighted, and the cynicism of middle age is far distant."⁴

A creative writer is not a psychologist. Since he is faithfully records the feeling, emotions, thought process, Cognitive and behavioural pattern of his characters who are taken from real life, he provides a good material to the psychologist to study. Sigmund Freud, when he was praised for the discovery of the unconscious, modestly said that creative writers had already discovered it; all that he did was to give a scientific explanation to it. Ruskin Bond's novellas and novels depict the life of the adolescents. All the narrations are made by them. No doubt, they encounter the adult world, their perception that of an adolescent. What is significant is that his novels are based on the real life events of his life. Even, at those places where he weaves a fantasy, we clearly see the lurking reality. The second important aspect of his novels and short stories is the hypnotising narration. He can easily be compared to Chaucer and Dickens. Dickens, of course, has been his model. Like them he is a very absorbing writer.

The Room on the Roof is a novel by an adolescent about the adolescent. It is clear that The Room on the Roof is a novel dealing with adolescence. It is a period of stress and strain. He or she wants more independence and likes the company of his or her group and shuns the elderly people to whom he or she was closely attached earlier. Bond has chosen young boys as main characters in the novel. The novel is autobiographical, hence true and sincere. The characters in the novel are Rusty, Ranbir, Somi, Kishen and Somi's mother. Ruskin Bond has mixed fact and fiction as his main aim is to present the emotional life of the adolescent.

It is the story of Rusty, a parentless Anglo- Indian boy in his teenage. His guardian, Mr. John Harrison is a strict Victorian guardian. Typically imperialist in nature and having the pride of the white race superiority over the Indian, he does not want Rusty to mix with them. But, an adolescent that he is, Rusty wants to widen his horizon. An adolescent can never remain confined to the precincts of a bungalow; he must go beyond it and encounter the world outside. This also happens with Rusty. He goes out and meet the Indian people. He goes out and meets the Indian people. The mingling of Rusty with the Indian boys can be interpreted in many ways.

“ Set in the 1950s, *The Room on the Roof* is a coming –of- age novel that explores the typically adolescent concerns of identity formation, alienation, rebellion against adult restrictions, personal autonomy, emerging sexuality, choosing a career, and financial independence.” (Meena Khorana) Rusty's departure from Harrison's house can be interpreted on two levels: the leaving of the emaciated Anglo-Indian society for the healthier Indian society and the departure from the stage of helplessness of a small boy to the stage of strong and energetic manhood.

His new world is free from the oppression of the colonial world; it is a world of freedom, of untrammelled joy and trustful comradeships. This is where the adolescents can develop their faculties in a desired way. Rusty's life can be favourably compared to that of David Copperfield. David lives under the rod of Hardstone. The school is no better and the worst is the Blacking Factory. Unable to bear the murky life at the factory, David runs away. His journey is full of pain and suffering. Rusty's life is not so miserable. He leaves Mr. Harrison's house but is never cheated by the people of Garhwal and Dehradun. The people he meets are all simple and sympathetic. Rusty as said earlier, is partly Bond himself. It was the love of its people that brought him back from England and he decided to live in India forever and write about the people here. The sunny atmosphere gives vigour and energy to Rusty. He revives his true spirit.

Meena Kapoor introduces her son Kishen and tells him the terms and conditions of tuition and shows the room on the roof where he was to live. The author describes it :

“ It was a small room, but this it did not matter much as there was very little in it. only a string bed, a table, a shelf and a few nails in the wall.⁵ The room, though very ordinary, is Rusty's citadel. Rusty likes this room very much. He has got freedom from his guardian. The room is his own and, like Shelley, he can survey everything with the pride of a monarch. The room is a symbol of the adolescent's ideal world- a good company of friends and love of a beautiful woman. Its symbolic meaning is convinced slowly and convincingly. Sigmund Freud , in his brilliant essay “ Creative writers and Day Dreaming” tells us that when a creative writer finds the real world extremely painful, he escapes into a world of fantasy of which he is the sole master.....⁶The room in fact was given by Somi's family and he was to teach Chotu, Somi's younger brother. The entire family laboured hard to make the room beautiful and comfortable. It is clear that the room in the novel is the symbol of Bond's idea as Byzantium is for W.B. Yeats. An adolescent is hungry for everything-food, company, love, sex, adventure, play and reading. Meena's beauty attracts him strongly. Peter Blos explains it : The aspect of “being in love” is a more familiar component of adolescent's life. It signals the advance of libido to new objects.⁷ Meena's premature death in the car accident is a turning point in the life of Rusty and Kishen. It creates a wide chasm between the lovely past and the ugly present. The stern reality of Meena Kapoor's death changes Rusty in a moment.

The arrival rainy season cleared the gloom of Rusty's mind as was the dirt of the town, the sky, the earth, the trees and flowers. The force and freshness of the rain brought tremendous relief, washed away the stagnation that had been settling on him, poisoning the mind and body. Now the adolescent is changed. Enthusiasm takes the place of morbidity and inaction. An adolescent has tremendous energy in him. A slight hope, a little encouragement or a little support puts him to action like Hanuman in the Ramayana. Hanuman remained calm and quiet but when Jambavan reminded of his prowess, he got ready for action. Rusty also recalls his prowess. He realizes that his life is meant for higher works. The novel is simple in narration and very much traditional in technique. The development of the story is in chronological order. But behind this simplicity of plot and narration there is the complex world of the adolescent, symbolised by *The Room on the Roof*. The plot of the novel is concerned with Rusty and his friends, all between ten and sixteen. They are carefree adolescents free from the restraints of the adult world and are on the verge of

experience. Theirs is the world of the adolescent, a world of untrammelled freedom where they dream of the future and make preparation for the adultlife.

References:

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