



Sounds I Like to hear -Ruskin Bond

Asst. Prof. Samina khan

Author

- **Ruskin Bond** is an Anglo Indian author. His father, Aubrey Alexander Bond was an officer of the Royal Air Force (RAF) post in India. He studied in Bishop Cotton School in Shimla. His first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, received the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, his novel in English. Bond has written hundreds of short stories, essays, novels and books for children. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014. He lives with his adopted family in Landour, Mussoorie.
- Ruskin Bond was born on 19 May 1934 to Edith Clarke and Aubrey Alexander Bond, in Kasauli, Punjab States Agency, British India. His father taught English to the princesses of Jamnagar palace and Ruskin and his sister Ellen lived there till he was six. Later, Ruskin's father joined the Royal Air Force in 1939 and Ruskin along with his mother and sister went to live at his maternal home at Dehradun.
- Shortly after that, he was sent to a boarding school in Mussourie. When Bond was eight years old, his mother separated from his father and married a Punjabi Hindu, Hari. His father arranged for Ruskin to be brought to New Delhi where he was posted. He was very close to his father and describes this period with his father as one of the happiest times of his life.
- When he was ten, his father died during the war, while he was posted in Calcutta. Ruskin was at his boarding school in Shimla and was informed about this tragedy by his teacher. He was thoroughly heartbroken. Later, he was raised by his mother and stepfather who lived in Dehradun.
- He did his schooling from Bishop Cotton School in Shimla, from where he graduated in 1950. He won several writing competitions in the school including the Irwin Divinity Prize and the Hailey Literature Prize. He wrote one of his first short stories, "Untouchable", at the age of sixteen in 1951.



Contd.

In 1963, he went to live in Mussoorie because besides liking the place, it was close to the editors and publishers in Delhi. He edited a magazine for four years. In the 1980s, Penguin set up in India and approached him to write some books. He had written *Vagrants in the Valley* in 1956, as a sequel to *The Room on the Roof*.

These two novels were published in one volume by **Penguin India** in 1993. The following year a collection of his non-fiction writings, *The Best of Ruskin Bond* was published by Penguin India. His interest in supernatural fiction led him to write popular titles such as *Ghost Stories from the Raj*, *A Season of Ghosts*, and *A Face in the Dark and other Hauntings*. Since then he has written over five hundred short stories, essays and novels, including ***The Blue Umbrella***, ***Funny Side Up***, ***A Flight of Pigeons*** and more than 50 books for children. He has also published his autobiography: *Scenes from a Writer's Life* describes his formative years growing up in Anglo-India and a further **autobiography**, *Lone Fox Dancing*, was published in 2017. *The Lamp is Lit* is a collection of essays and episodes from his journal.

Literary style

Most of his works are influenced by life in the hill stations at the foothills of the Himalayas, where he spent his childhood. His first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, was written when he was 16 and published when he was 21.

It was partly based on his experiences at Dehradun, in his small rented room on the roof, and his friends. His earlier works were written without it being meant for any particular readership.

His first children's book, *Angry River*, published in the 1970s, had its writing toned down on a publisher's request for a children's story. On writing for children, he said, "I had a pretty lonely childhood and it helps me to understand a child better." Bond's work reflects his Anglo-Indian experiences and the changing political, social and cultural aspects of India, having been through colonial, postcolonial and post-independence phases of India.

Bond said that while his autobiographical work, *Rain in the Mountains*, was about his years spent in Mussoorie, *Scenes from a Writer's Life* described his first 21 years. *Scenes from a Writer's Life* focuses on Bond's trip to England, his struggle to find a publisher for his first book *The Room on the Roof* and his yearning to come back to India, particularly to Doon. "It also tells a lot about my parents", said Bond. "The book ends with the publication of my first novel and my decision to make writing my livelihood", Bond said, adding: "Basically, it describes how I became a writer".

- Being a writer for over 50 years, Bond experimented with different genres; early works include fiction, short stories, novella with some being autobiographical. Later, he tried out non-fiction, romance and books for children. He said his favourite genres are essays and short stories. He considers himself a "visual writer" because for short stories, he first imagines it like a film and then notes it down.



Rain in the mountain: Notes from the himalaya s

It is a collection of stories, snippets, essays and poems penned by the writer after having lived in many hamlets across the mountains in the Himalayas. Through his subtle, simple and lucid writing, the author beautifully brings alive many natural sights and sounds that evoke the essence of natural mountain life.

Both prose and poetry in the book are centered around nature with all the purity that it holds. Rain in the Mountains: Notes from the Himalayas touches a raw nerve for an urban dweller when it describes the beauty of mountain wilderness, surrounded by chirping birds, squirrels, a blue sky with moving clouds casting light and shade shadows. The book can be a good companion for contemplation and quiet reading.

It introduces the readers with an innocent form of writing, which uses simplicity in words to describe some of the routine but beautiful things around us. The book has stories like Once Upon a Mountain Time and records the moods and likings of the writer with reflective notes like “Sounds I Like to Hear”, “Sounds of the Sea”, “How Far Is the River” and “After the Monsoon”.



text

All night the rain has been drumming on the corrugated tin roof. There has been no storm, no thunder, just the steady swish of a tropical downpour. It helps me to be awake; at the same time, it doesn't keep one from sleeping.

It is a good sound to read by – the rain outside, the quiet within – and, although tin roofs are given to springing unaccountable leaks, there is in general a feeling of being untouched by, and yet in touch with, the rain.

Gentle rain on a tin roof is one of my favourite sounds. And early in the morning, when the rain has stopped, there are other sounds I like to hear – a crow shaking the raindrops from his feathers and cawing rather disconsolately; babblers and bulbuls bustling in and out of bushes and long grass in search of worms and insects; the sweet, ascending trill of the Himalayan whistling thrush; dogs rushing through damp undergrowth.

A cherry tree, bowed down by the heavy rain, suddenly rights itself, flinging pellets of water in my face.

Some of the best sounds are made by water. The water of a mountain stream, always in a hurry, bubbling over rocks and chattering, 'I'm late, I'm late!' like the White Rabbit, tumbling over itself in its anxiety to reach the bottom of the hill; the sound of the sea, especially when it is far away – or when you hear it by putting a seashell to your ear. The sound made dry and thirsty earth, as it sucks at a sprinkling of water. Or the sound of a child drinking thirstily, the water running down his chin and throat.

Water gushing out of the pans on an old well outside a village while a camel moves silently round the well. Bullock-cart wheels creaking over rough country roads. The clip-clop of a pony carriage and the tinkle of its bell; and the singsong call of its driver.

Bells in the hills. A school bell ringing and children's voices drifting through an open window. A temple bell, heard faintly from across the valley. Heavy silver ankle-bells on the feet of sturdy hill women. Sheep bells heard high up on the mountainside.

Do falling petals make sound? Just the tiniest and softest of sounds, like the drift of falling snow. Of course, big flowers, like dahlias, drop their petals with a very definite flop. These are showoffs, like the hawk-moth who comes flapping into the rooms at night instead of emulating the butterfly dipping lazily on the afternoon breeze.

One must return to the birds for favorite sounds, and the birds of the plains differ from the birds of the hills. On a cold winter morning in the plains of northern India, if you walk some way into the jungle you will hear the familiar call of the black partridge: 'Bhagwan teri qudrat' it seems to cry, which means, 'O God, great is thy might.'

The cry rises from the bushes in all directions; but an hour later not a bird is to be seen or heard and the jungle is so very still that the silence seems to shout at you.

There are sounds that come from a distance, beautiful because they are far away, voices on the wind – they ‘walked upon the wings of the wind’. The cries of fishermen, out, on the river. Drums, beating rhythmically, in a distant village. The croaking of frogs, from the rainwater pond behind the house. I mean frogs at a distance. A frog croaking beneath one’s window is as welcome as a motor horn....

But some people like motor horns. I know a taxi-driver who never misses an opportunity to use horn. It was made to his own specifications, and it gives out a resonant bugle-call. He never tires of using it. Cyclists and pedestrians always scatter at his approach. Other cars veer off the road. He is proud of his horn. He loves its strident sound– which only goes to show that some men’s sounds are other men’s noises!

Homely sounds, though we don’t often think about them, are the ones we miss most when they are gone. A kettle on the boil. A door that creaks on its hinges. Old sofa springs. Familiar voices lightning up the dark. Ducks quacking in the rain.

And so we return to the rain, with which my favorite sounds began.

I have sat out in the open at night, after a shower of rain when the whole air is murmuring and tinkling with the voices of crickets and grasshoppers and little frogs. There is one melodious sound, a sweet repeated trill, which I have never been able to trace to its source. Perhaps it is a little tree frog. Or it may be a small green cricket. I shall never know.

I am not sure that I really want to know. In an age when a scientific and rational explanation has been given for almost everything we see and touch and hear, it is good to be left with one small mystery, a mystery sweet and satisfying and entirely my own.

Thank You

