CONVERSATION WITH RUSKIN BOND.

Talking to Ruskin Bond was like inhaling fresh mountain air. His gentle voice puts one at ease and one can suddenly feel reassured. Author of nearly a hundred written works each bearing his stamp, discusses about his feelings and laughingly brushes aside any remark that compliments him on his achievements. He is too modest to accept any praise. When I congratulated him on the Honorary Doctorate from Garhwal University, Shrinagar Utteranchal, he says that it is not so important. It is just a small thing. He turned seventy this year and he has been writing since he was 17. It is a long career of almost fifty years. In his non-fiction, like memoirs and autobiography he has written everything about himself and his life.

Lalita: Would you like to be recognized as a writer for children?

Ruskin Bond: Oh, well I wrote a few stories for children.

Children in India like to read your fiction. You are one of the most popular authors in India.

R B- Well, children understand what I write. They find it easy as the style is simple. It is easy for them.

Your novel “The Room on the Roof” is one of the best, written so far for the adolescent readers in India.

It is up to you. The reader has to make his choice. I wrote it when I was in the Channel Islands, New Jersey, feeling very lonely. It is raw. I was only seventeen then. But out of my loneliness I wrote the novel, raw, naïve and imperfect. But brimming with life and joy and truth, my own truth for, to be true to oneself is to be true to others.

It was only when I came to live in the hills that I developed in to the sort of personal nature writer and children’s writer. I have learnt to laugh at myself. When I was young I took myself seriously.
The children in your novellas keep moving all the time. They have an urge to break away. There is some sort of restlessness.

I have elaborated this in one of my writings for a journal. It is reproduced in one of my non-fiction The Lamp is Lit. Great storywriters like Maxim Gorki were tramps. Stevenson did a lot of tramping before he settled down on his South Sea Islands. Wordsworth wandered lonely as a cloud. Even Kalidasa records in his poem Meghadoota his wanderings in the Vindhya Mountains. Conrad tramped on the high seas. They were lonely men wanderers rather than travellers. I remain a wanderer at heart even today. My heroes are Kim, Huck Finn and Captain Marlowe.

Your presence is felt in every line of your writings. Is it necessary for the author to be present all the time while writing for a young reader? How does one write well for children satisfying their need for identity emotional release or fulfillment, entertainment, information etc.? We do not become writers in the school of creative writing or workshops. I wouldn’t have written so much of childhood or even about other children if my childhood had been filled with happy and contented experiences. Those of us who are sensitive and on top of that you are torn in different directions both emotionally and physically we might end up becoming writers. I have put myself into my writings. I have narrated things truthfully. Being true to oneself is being true to others. I live through my writings, and my writings are a true depiction my self.

Writing for the young is a specialized field. What type of writing would you recommend for the young reader in India?

I hardly made any conscious effort to write for a particular group of children. My nature writings would interest them, as they can
understand it easily. I was an avid reader when I was a child. Dickens of course was one of my favourites. I read David Copperfield, which I enjoyed thoroughly, identifying myself with young David. I got inspiration to become a writer. I think in my heart I knew that I am best suited for the writer's job.

Which book would you have chosen to read as an adolescent?

Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights. My grandmother told me not to touch that book. May be that made it more attractive. On an emotional level I was drawn to the manner in which Emily created an eerie atmosphere shrouding the moors. I couldn't keep my eyes off the printed word. What I find nice about this novel is, when I went back to reading it again when I was fifteen I found that I liked it as much as I had done on my first reading. Some like Hugh Walpole's Fortitude are still stirring but the rest no longer interests me. Wuthering Heights is one such novel I appreciated every time I read it. It is not easy to be able to draw the reader's attention years after the first reading. It is not an easy job. Even at this age I would love to leaf through my copy of Wuthering Heights once again. It has created that enduring effect. The mystery of the Moors haunts me even today with as much passion as it had decades ago done to my awe struck teenage mind.

It is the seventieth spring of your life. How does it feel like to be seventy?

Not very different from what it felt like when I was seventeen. Except that I can't climb trees anymore. Life is wonderful and one must have as much of it as possible. We are just puny mortals after all. The pleasure as well as pathos of life springs from the knowledge of its transitory nature.
What is your message to your avid young readers in India and the aspiring writers for adolescents who are inspired by you and want to emulate?

Now a days literary agents play an important role. You don't get published unless they recommend your writing. They think that they know better what is good for the reading public. In India we are fortunate to be without them. The relation between the author and publisher is still important. Indian publishing is making great strides. Where there is life, there is hope. Or is it the other way round? Creative people don't age and happiness has nothing to do with youth or old age. To take life lightly and in good humor is to get the most fun out of it. A sense of humor is not something you can cultivate. Either you have it or you don't. Mr. Pickwik with his innocent good nature would be happy anytime or place or era. But the self-doubting, guilt ridden Hamlet? Never.

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